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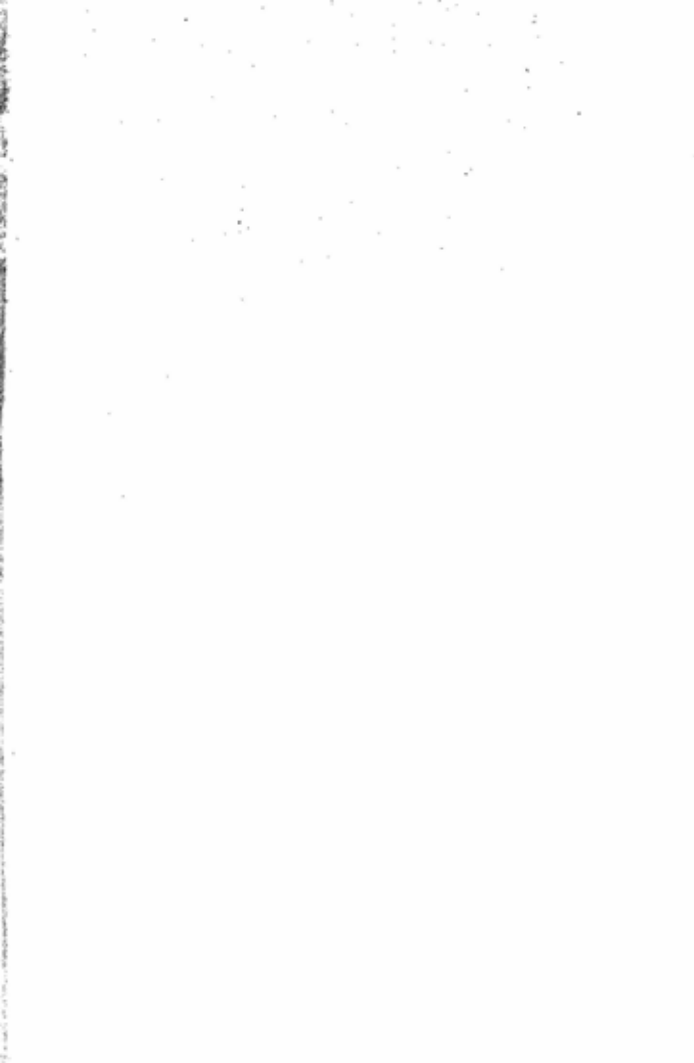
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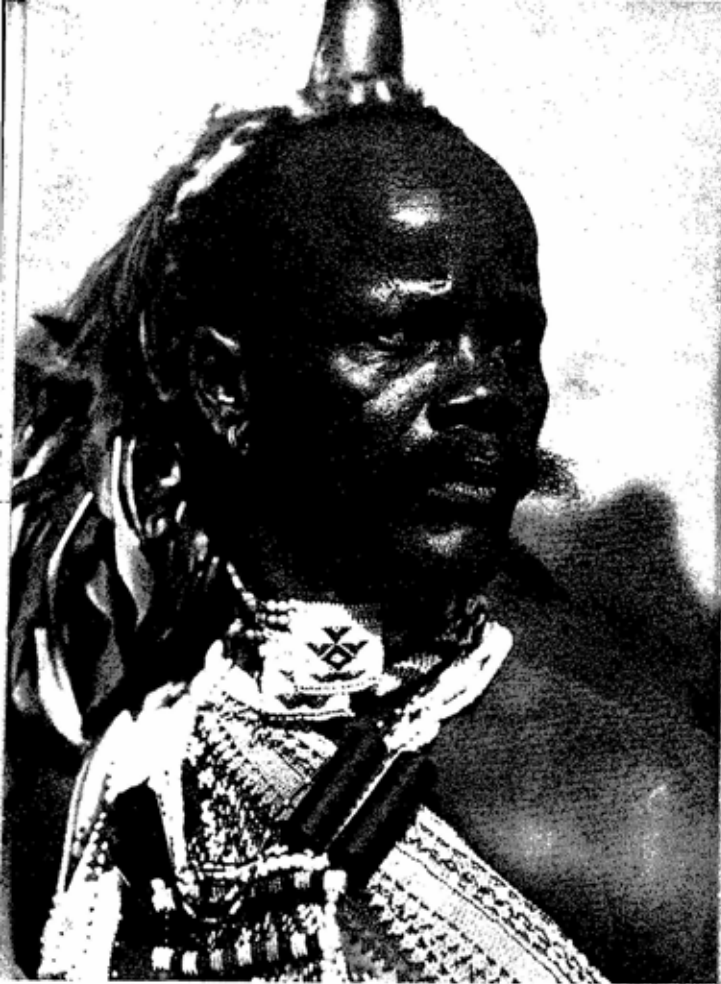


SANGOMA

By the same author

KING OF THE GORILLAS
TOM TOMS IN THE NIGHT
HIDDEN AFRICA
BLACK MIST
HERE IS AFRICA
MEDITERRANEAN SPOTLIGHTS
HERE IS THE VELD
GREAT MOTHER FOREST
SARANGA
THE WRATH OF MOTO
ADVENTURE IN BLACK AND WHITE
KILLERS ALL!
SOUTH OF THE SAHARA
KAMANDA
KAMANDA ON SAFARI
THE NEW AFRICA
AFRICA IS ADVENTURE





Sashelo — "He of the Horn" and the "Witchdoctor of Smell"

SANGOMA

by

Attilio Gatti

36477

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To Jimmy Deacon,
darlingest of all friends,
old and new

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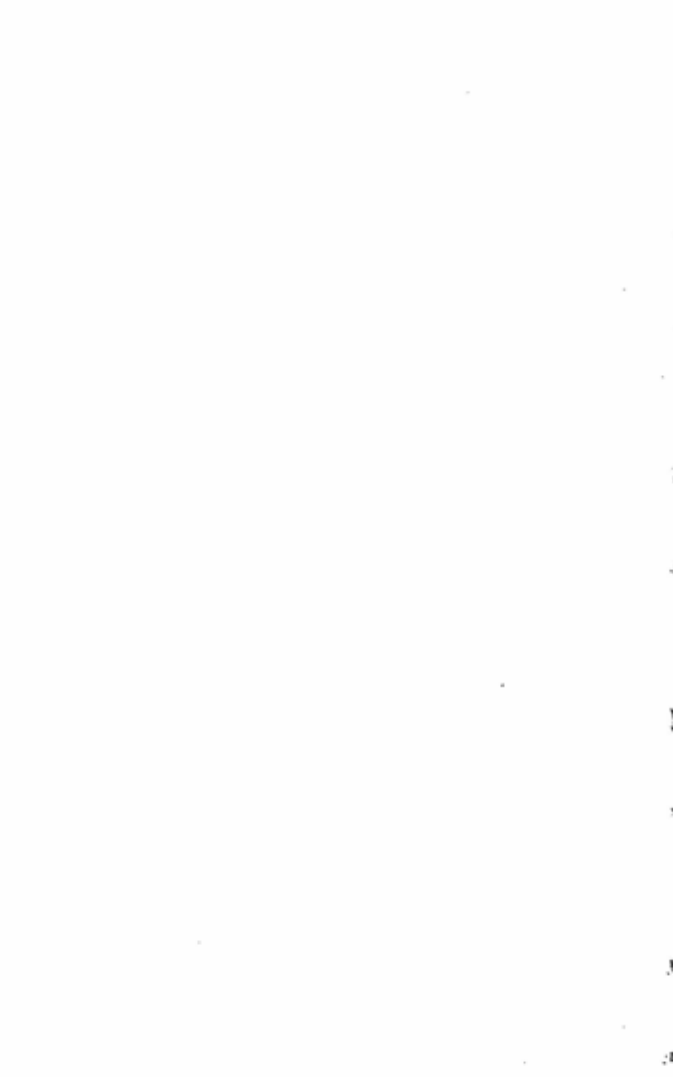
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FOREWORD

LAST winter my wife and I, just back from our latest African expedition, decided to sell our large Vermont house in America and to move for a few years to a quiet little place in Switzerland. This meant that I first had to spend several weeks going through a fearful quantity of records, logs, diaries, souvenirs and all kinds of papers accumulated during the thirty-nine years of my African life, in order to destroy most of them so that I could squeeze the remainder into the comparatively limited space of a Lugano apartment.

Early one evening I came upon an old official letter about which I hadn't thought for I don't know how long. In fact, I had completely forgotten that it was still in my possession. But I had certainly never forgotten its contents. The minute my fingers touched that flimsy sheet of paper, my eyes ran fast along the typed lines. I was surprised to see that I remembered the communication almost word for word. Not only this; the thrilling, dramatic events to which this letter referred instantly rushed back to my mind, as clearly as if they had just happened.

Alone in the big, now very silent house, I abandoned everything else and grabbed my logbooks for 1929 to 1933. As I began to read my daily entries, I found that most of them were still in Italian, because at that time I had barely begun to pick up English. Entire conversations with Belgian officials were recorded in French, a language which has always been as familiar to me as my native tongue. Talks with natives were reported, at times quite extensively, in my own peculiar spelling of Kingwana, Swahili, Bangala, Bambuti, etc. On other days I seemed to have been too rushed to write anything more than some names of natives, tribes, localities. On other pages again, I found only rough sketches and brief notes, evidently jotted down in a great hurry and purely for immediate use.

At first, this unholy medley of languages and of signs in discoloured ink and smudged pencil seemed to make little sense. But, in no time, all suggestion of confusion disappeared. Once more everything was as clear to me as if it had been written yesterday. People, voices, faces; places, smells, sounds; emotions, hopes, fears—they all came to life with startling freshness. I became fascinated. The further I went ahead, the more clearly each detail emerged—even infinitesimal ones which I could have sworn time had long since wiped off my memory. Dawn found me still reading, remembering, re-living those harsh, exquisitely thrilling, distant days, down to the cruellest moments, the most excruciating agonies and the too many deaths which had been their climax.

There and then I began reconsidering the reasons which had kept me so long from writing about those days—and the Mulahu. It wasn't long before I came to the conclusion that these reasons (of which more later) were no longer valid, indeed had ceased to exist.

Hence this book's *Part I: The Mulahu*—the mighty creature whose African name newspapermen of today would probably freely translate into "The Abominable Jungleman". As for the chaotic events which, during the last year or so, have shaken the ex-Belgian Congo and kept the world's attention almost daily riveted on that tortured country, as far as the Mulahu is concerned it is as if they had occurred in some entirely different portion of the earth. Not even the faintest echo of the deeds and misdeeds of Kasavubu, Mobutu, Bomboko, Tshombe, Lumumba, Gizenga has ever reached the secret home of the Mulahu—just as the Mulahu's name has probably never reached the too busy ears of these harassed politicians.

A. G.

PART ONE

THE MULAHU
THE AFRICA THAT *WAS*



1

"LIMIT OF FOREST UNKNOWN"

I FIRST became convinced that the Mulahu was not a myth, but an actually existing great ape, in 1928, almost thirty-three years ago. Livingstone and Stanley had written about this creature as of a fantastic monster. Practically every African explorer since them had been impressed by hints and stories they had picked up here and there concerning the Mulahu, and tried to find its tracks, dreamed of becoming its discoverer. Now it was my turn. And I was determined to do something about it.

The undertaking sounded an impossible one. But I was young, strong, ambitious. I had made up my mind where I should go and how I should go about it.

Not even the best map available at the time succeeded in discouraging me. Yet, it should have done so. It was a section of the military map put out by one of the most reliable sources; the Geographical Section of the British General Staff (*Africa: Sheet 92-F*). A simple glance at it will show what kind of country I was planning to penetrate and work in. It will also prove that when I am talking of unexplored, uncharted jungle I am neither merely repeating a trite phrase nor attempting to make the setting of the story sensational. I am only stating incontestable facts.

A closer observation of this section of *Sheet 92-F* will reveal that it contains little more than the bare courses of the principal rivers, a partial outline of the greatest mountains and very few names of tribes and villages. And this only along the eastern portion. For this zone, at least, had been superficially explored shortly before, in order to allow the establishment of a preliminary delimitation line between that part of the Belgian Congo and the adjacent British East African territories.

When, however, you start from the map's lower right-hand side and follow it diagonally upwards toward the top left corner (as I did, for I had decided to proceed with my safari from the south-east, in the general direction of north-west) you will be as startled as I was at the time. And just as little assisted.

First, you will notice a confusion of peaks from 14,000 to 16,000 feet high. Further on, come larger and larger expanses of little green tufts, which represent the thickest of jungles (or forests, as the British cartographers call them). Then you will be faced by such unusual topographical expressions as "Long Grass", "Long Grass and Bush", "Dense Forest" and "Inaccessible Country Covered with Dense Forest", printed across entirely blank spaces, or ever-increasing stretches of little green tufts.

Finally, the latter spread into larger and larger widths which, almost bare of any word or name, are only studded here and there with white blotches, and ultimately melt into a greater, completely white zone. *This at that time was the entirely unexplored country.* There are squares upon squares of it. Each square represents some 150 square miles of mysterious regions as little known as if they had been on the surface of Venus. All that can be read there is again "Dense Forest". And, gem of all understatements, "Limit of Forest Unknown".

The map's grim warnings were bad enough. Had they left me in any doubt, it ought to have been promptly dispelled by the difficulties that the various authorities began to put across my path the moment I determined, regardless, to go ahead with my plan.

Such trouble was quite unexpected, that many years ago. For "red tape" had not yet taken root in that part of the world. Where now a good-sized town or a large city stands, at that time there was only a little post consisting of a few offices and houses made of mud walls smothered under thick, thatched roofs, with a few score of native huts scattered around them. The present complicated bureaucracy of dozens of busy, hugely staffed, widely spread departments was then still represented by, here and there, a lonely, malarial official, with maybe a couple of young anæmic assistants.

Where today conducted tours by the hundreds, bring thousands of tourists a year, visitors were either a rarity or a species still totally

unheard of. Let alone jets, rockets, helicopters, planes, buses, cars and trucks, even the most primitive, elementary means of transportation and communication petered out the moment you got a few miles away from posts and small towns. A bicycle meant the height of comfort, a luxury afforded by very few, selected, fortunate individuals. Even fewer, outside the immediate vicinity of a post or mission, were the paths which would permit the passage of wheels. Your normal vehicle was your legs. Your baggage, carefully limited, travelled on the heads of porters.

When you finally arrived at the place of an official, he was usually quite pleased to see a new face—the first he had seen that year, maybe. You would meet him across a rough, locally hewn table, and, over a warm drink of scotch or beer, you would exchange news, explain your problems, request what little assistance you could hope for. Permits, licences, the thousand and one other formalities which today require your dealing with half-a-score of departments for twice as many days, were then solved over that first drink, or perhaps the second one. If the official was a very orderly type, he might even produce a pencil-stub and a scrap of paper, and scribble down a few lines for you. Otherwise, he was satisfied with what you had told him and what he had told you. That was all. In a few minutes, all business matters were settled. And you were free to talk about more interesting things until the emptiness of bottles, the sputtering of a thirsty hurricane lamp or the overpowering attacks of insects sent you to hide and sleep under a carefully tucked-in mosquito net.

The morning after, before starting off, you had some kind of breakfast with the official, who dreaded to see you go because more months of unbroken solitude were going to start again for him. As for you, you knew you wouldn't reach another post for weeks, sometimes for months.

Normally, the relationship was easy-going, extremely friendly, based on reciprocal consideration and nothing but the most open-hearted mutual co-operation.

On this occasion, the whole atmosphere was different, from the very beginning. By the time I had reached the dead end of the road from Nairobi and Fort Portal to the northern shores of Lake

Edward, difficulties of all kinds had accumulated. Then it became no longer a matter of surmounting one unexpected obstacle after the other, but of being confronted with what was practically a material impossibility. For a time it seemed that I had come all the way for nothing. Much as I persisted, I was told that there was no way to enroll enough porters to get all my equipment over and across the pass through the Ruwenzori group, the ancient geographers' Mountains of the Moon.

Yet, I was convinced more than ever that there was only one comparatively small part of the jungle where the Mulahu could reasonably be expected to have survived. And only one way to approach it, from the south-east. Therefore I fought, on and on, smoothing out or by-passing this and that obstruction—until the day arrived when my safari began to come into existence. A few more weeks, and it was thoroughly organized, properly supplied, duly protected and ready to start.

My caravan was composed of three groups of thirty porters. Each man was to carry on his head one of the twenty-five-pound loads into which all the equipment had been divided, and packed in New York, London and Milan. Every group was under the orders of a *kapita*, or headman, helped by two improvised *askari*. The latter I had armed with ancient, bayoneted blunderbusses and had very approximately militarized by getting them into a kind of uniform composed of fez, bush shirt and shorts.

Of course, no food except wild fruit and perhaps some edible roots could be counted upon on our long, hard trail, for we had to trace it mostly through mountainous jungles in which no human being had ever lived. Therefore each porter was followed by another native carrying his food for the whole journey—chunks of smoked, exceedingly aromatic elephant meat, baskets of banana and manioc flour, bunches of sweet potatoes, and so on. The chain, and the troubles, didn't end there, of course. For, who was to transport the provisions for the men carrying my porters' food? Their wives, naturally. But, then, each wife had to be followed by at least a couple of children loaded with her own commissariat and cooking pots. What the children themselves ate, I never found out exactly. I expect that all the grown-ups chipped in to feed them.

Which was just as well, because I already had the responsibility of quite a crowd. Including my personal boys, the guides, the gun-bearers, the relief men, and the sorcerers and medicine men supposed to keep the spirits of the dead and the bodies of the living more or less happy, I had to find, enroll, supply and organize no less than 496 men, women and children. This meant 496 headaches, as I would have to keep an eye on them the whole time, to herd them into safety at night, and to keep them going in an interminable single file from morning to evening.

And all just to move a little more than one ton of baggage to what the map called "Beni, Congolese Station". Theoretically, or as the crow is supposed to fly, all we had to cover was a distance of about 100 miles. But that was what the map said. The terrain had very different ideas. How many more hundreds of miles our weary feet actually had to cover, I couldn't now even begin to guess. All I know is that, what with mountains and "Dense Forest", "Long Grass" and "Inaccessible Country", those infernal hundred miles took us no less than fifty nine-hour days of march: an average of four hours and a half per "crow" mile, or two "map" miles per nine-hour day; or, to look at it another way, 1250 man hours for the transportation of each of my twenty-five-pound loads.

2

THE OLD AND THE NEW BENI

THERE is something to be said about civilization and progress and modern ways of travel, I know. Yet, I wouldn't want to have missed those hard, harsh, enthralling days for anything on earth.

You were a *man* then—not a package, tenderly handled from pressurized plane to rubber-foam-seat bus to air-conditioned hotel. True, you sweated and shivered, grumbled and cursed. You were eaten alive by mosquitoes and elephant flies and safari ants. There were times when you were thirsty or starving, stinkingly unbathed, utterly exhausted or shaking with fever. But your feet walked on untrodden ground, opened new paths, broke century-old taboos. Your eyes took in horizons, sights, creatures which no white man had seen before.

You dealt with natives, shy and frightened at your appearance, or unfriendly, aggressive, violently resenting your intrusion. In either case you, and you alone, had to conquer their fears or their hostility, to win their confidence, to persuade them with every one of your actions that you were just, fair, decent, understanding, wise—a friend, not an enemy. When they gave you their loyalty, you treasured it above everything; you had no hesitation in putting your life in their hands—and it couldn't have been in better ones, as I believe I will prove convincingly before the conclusion of this story.



When we finally reached Beni, the furthest point to which the porters had consented to go, it was only to find a bitter surprise. The "Congolese Station" had ceased to exist. A mound surmounted

by a cross of roughly cut stone, the blackened ruins of many burned-down grass huts, the doorless, crumbling structures of some mud houses were all that remained to indicate that the place had once been inhabited.

Since the last time I had been there, a few years before, the ravages of jungle malaria, of blackwater fever, of sleeping sickness and of several still unnamed maladies, had compelled the few whites to abandon that hellish spot. A hand-written, barely readable notice, nailed into what had formerly been the administrator's office, explained that he had had to move north a few months before. Herding ahead of him the quite miserable tribes of the region, he had gone to build a new station and new villages in an area some twenty kilometres away from the old post on the shore of the pestilential, crocodile-infested Semliki river.

Briefly, the notice mentioned also that the trail which had been Old Beni's only means of communication with the rest of the world was not being enlarged and continued. From the New Beni, northward, it was slowly being made into what the administrator not too hopefully announced as a "so-called dirt road". Its approximate course, by the way, is indicated on the map by the two lines which the administrator himself traced with a pencil, at the same time marking the approximate position of New Beni, a few days after I finally got there.

I vividly remember how New Beni looked then. Today it is a pretty, bustling, orderly little town called, simply, Beni. Probably very few people still remember such terms as Old Beni and New Beni. At any rate, the latter, when I first saw it, consisted of six thatched mud-houses—the administrator's office, his home, a small building for his two assistants, an infirmary, a jail and a *duka* (or little store), which proudly, but rashly, bore a hand-written sign saying "hotel", by this meaning two cubicles of still wet mud which had just been added to the back of the shelter. Spread all around, in tightly close, scared-looking groups, there were a good many native huts which housed the administrator's policemen and their families, some of the road labourers and a few more Africans.

Luckily, there was also a new, almost completed, large hut which was to become the storeroom of the *Administrateur Territorial*,

and which the A.T. at once put at my disposal for the safe keeping of my equipment.

To this kind of metropolis, some 500 people arriving from the outside looked like a full-sized invasion. The A.T. evidently wished it cleared off as soon as possible. My porters and assorted appendages (who had given me quite some trouble as a result of the extra march from Old Beni to New Beni) were in a hurry to get away from that mistrusted portion of the jungle. Which made it unanimous; because, during that safari, I had already had two bad attacks of malaria. I was now enjoying a snorter of a third one, and I had, moreover, grown slightly tired of the whole gang and of the unending problems with which they loaded me.

The next two days were taken up by checking and storing the equipment, collecting back the weapons of the *askari*, paying off them, the medicine men, the porters, the porters' porters, the porters' porters' wives and children, and distributing hundreds of tips, every one of them, of course, carefully proportioned to the age and the rank and the special merit, if any, of each individual.

When all was finished, the inevitable festivities followed. Around a hundred fires, a great banquet took place, accompanied by songs and dances, which kept us awake the entire night. The following morning, the fires were dead—and so, for the time, was the entire population, temporary and permanent; until, after lunch, the combined efforts of the A.T., myself and the least sleepy of his policemen managed to wake one group after another.

When, at long last, the entire invasion had disappeared, a wonderful quiet descended upon New Beni. With sighs of relief, the A.T. and I collapsed into rough chairs on either side of the monumental mahogany table which was his desk, and I produced my *Sheet 92-F* map.

As the pencil of the A.T. marked on it the approximate course of the new road under construction, I noticed that his lines followed quite closely the border between the little green tufts and the westward, entirely blank portion of the map. Of course, I asked what the jungle was like, in those virgin squares. At my question, the A.T.'s face became blanker than the squares themselves.

"What's there? Why—just what your map says, I suppose.

'Forest', as the British call it, 'Dense', as they are so funny as to describe it. As for the 'Limit of Forest Unknown' printed across the white space, the words sum up practically all I know about it!"

"But," I tried to argue, "I want to get inside there, to put up a permanent camp, to move about from this camp, to investigate the existence of some unknown animals. Can't you at least tell me something about the natives who live there? About a chief or two I could trust?"

The A.T. stared at me, plucking his eyebrows, as if trying to decide if I was sane or not. Then, suddenly, he burst into a bellowing laugh. He was a rough, tall, stout Belgian. The volume of his laughter was even more impressive than the hugeness of his size.

"That's a good one!" he shouted. "Here I am, alone with two malarial, inexperienced, young assistants. All we have to do is to build a new station; to keep a just-opened soft road from being washed away by every hurricane, from being reconquered by the vegetation, and (several times a week) from being ground to pieces by herds of elephants; to administer a country half as large as Belgium; to watch the work of entire tribes of lazy, sick, weak natives who are scared to death because this jungle is new to them—even to collect taxes from the original inhabitants, savages who have never before paid tribute to the white man. And you expect me to—to have had time to go gallivanting around to find out what there is, or there isn't, in thousands of square miles of unexplored jungle. Ah! That's a good one. Of all the . . ."

He slapped his thigh, opened his mouth to finish the sentence, changed its shape to repeat that that was a good one, then sobered up.

"Sorry," he said. "I'm being rude. Without reason, and without intention, I assure you. It's just that no human being can stand this kind of life for long—the lack of every elementary comfort, the continuous strain of so many responsibilities. My nerves are shot to pieces, I'm afraid. But it is my job, and that's that. But you, you who do not *have* to be in such a place. To see you who have come all the way from the States, then from the coast, then by foot from nowhere . . . to go and bury yourself in that hell of a jungle. . . . Well, it was just too much."

Then: "*Planton!*" he called. And, giving some orders to the

ghostly-looking native policeman who had popped into the room, he got ponderously up.

"Let's close this so-called office for the day," he said to me. "Let's go to my so-called house of mud and grass, and get a so-called bracing drink of cut whisky and warm water. It may stimulate my so-called brain, if there is any left in my skull. Anyway, I'll tell you what little I can. Though I doubt if it can be of much use. Come on, let's go."

3

HA, HA!

I HAD never before been in that particular portion of the immense equatorial jungle. Neither had I organized and undertaken such a costly, complicated trip to any part of it, prompted only by some vague hunch. But I was not a complete greenhorn. I had already had ten years of Africa by then, most of which time had been spent in other, not very dissimilar parts of Central Africa.

I had sweated and toiled month after weary, battered month in the mountainous jungles of the Kivu, to pursue, with the help of the Mambuti pygmies, my study of the life of the Giant Gorilla; until, finally, I had had to use my second and last special permit to get, for the Pretoria Museum and the University of Witwatersrand, a superb specimen, almost as formidable as my first one (which still holds the world's record for size).

I had worn my legs shorter by years of marching through the jungles on the slopes of the Crystal Mountains, along the banks of the Lualaba and Kasai rivers, around the shore of the Albert, Edward and Tanganyika lakes.

Most of these jungles I had found to be not only unexplored but practically untouched from the scientific point of view. In the depths of them, with scientists attached to one or another of my expeditions, I had discovered, collected and classified close to three score of new insects, reptiles and small mammals. On my own, I had prepared the ground for discovering, tracking down, describing and naming a new race of Okapi and a new variety of Bongo—specimens of which I was later to capture with my wife's wonderful assistance.

Nevertheless, with every new discovery we made, I had more strongly realized that we were just feebly scratching a minute

section of an immense surface. The more secrets we uncovered, the more I understood that the fauna, the flora, the geology of that million square miles of dank, dark, unknown jungle constituted a bottomless mine. Obviously, there was, there, a treasure chest of overwhelming proportions; one big enough to produce new discoveries by the thousands—if only there had been enough people interested in this gigantic work of revelation—and with sufficient stamina, endurance, learning and means to carry it through on a big scale.

However, that's another story. What's more to the point is that everywhere in that jungle I had, sooner or later, elicited from natives and pygmies some information pointing to the same strange, phantom-like, terror-inspiring creature: *The Mulahu*.

In my patient, stubborn quest for this creature I had been greatly assisted by my natural facility for languages, especially for African ones. Not that I have ever learned to speak even one in a grammatic, erudite manner; it would have done me no good, anyway. But, in a few days, I could always pick up enough words of a new language or dialect to say and understand all I needed—and to avoid entirely the stifling, often ruinous use of interpreters. In a week or two, I would be speaking that language or dialect fluently—and that mattered a great deal.

Being too well mannered to laugh at my mistakes, natives appreciated, instead, my efforts to master their tongue. Concentrating all their attention on my words (poor in variety as they might be), watching the expressions of my face and my gestures (still eloquently Latin despite all my efforts to the contrary), they managed in no time, to understand perfectly all I said and wanted. Much more important, they got to feel that I liked and respected them, that I was not one to laugh at their beliefs and superstitions—absurd, preposterous as these might appear to other white men. They also soon realized that, far from being a man of government or of the Church, I was a friend, interested only in earning their friendship and confidence—not in reporting their peccadilloes, nor in having them punished for following ancestral customs and ways of life which at times ran smack against the rules and regulations established by distant, not always too understanding authorities.

The usual result was that in no time a very pleasant relationship would be established, to endure for more years than one might have expected. It was a solid bond. And because of it, I have learned and seen and witnessed numbers of things which would never even reach the ear of an official or a missionary (while I'm the first to admit that the latter, because of their position and permanency know of endless other matters of which I'm ignorant—essentially because I'm not a bit interested in them).

This was the way it went from my very first days on African soil. It has been very especially so with the pygmies and tribesmen of a score of races in various parts of the equatorial jungle, because I have lived and worked very closely with them for such long periods.

Though the Mulahu proved to be the hardest subject of talk even with my best and oldest African friends, in the long run some scrap of information always came to the surface. Needless to say, I quickly grabbed at each of these, jealously stored it away, then carefully compared and tested it with previous ones, until out of them all I managed to form a reasonably complete picture.

Some of these clues came to me as the result of a young hunter's sudden burst of loquaciousness. Others unwillingly emerged from the boasts of a native who had helped himself too freely to home-brewed *pombe*. Others again were offered reluctantly as a token of gratitude by an elder to whom I had rendered a service he considered important, or freely given as the appreciation of a sorcerer or a *kapita* whom I had recompensed with special generosity. But, one way or another, willingly or unconsciously, people everywhere would give me new hints, or allow me to dig out new items of information about the Mulahu.

Not that all the jungle inhabitants mentioned the creature in the same manner, of course. Nor did they call it by the same word; in fact, I have collected nine different names for it. The nearer to the Ituri, I observed, the more these names sounded like Mulahu. Far away from those white squares in the British General Staff's map, the animal was described hazily, with contradictory details, and was talked about with a relative indifference. Whereas, all around the Ituri, the descriptions increased in sharpness and similarity; and a

deep, superstitious fear invariably lowered the voices, widened the eyes, embarrassed the expressions of any natives with whom I broached the matter.

Inside the Ituri itself, it was much worse. Twice, in previous expeditions, I had approached the triangle of jungle contained between the three small posts of Irumu, Mambasa and Old Beni. Both times, as I persisted in my investigations, I was confronted by an even more frightened attitude. *Mulahu*? They had never known such a name, the natives answered. Never even heard of such a thing. Was I saying it was an animal? Ha, Ha! Surely I was in good humour. Evidently I wanted to joke with them, to tease them. They bent with laughter. They slapped each other's backs. They made themselves bold enough to ask me any amount of questions: about myself, the other white people and the boys of my expedition, our equipment—anything just to try and change the subject.

Their guffaws rang false. There was sheer terror in the glances they furtively exchanged. The way they pronounced that never-heard-of word, *Mulahu*, was sufficient proof in itself. You knew at once it was a word of their own tongue. And one which they dreaded mentioning or even hearing a white man pronounce in their presence.

4

"MYTHS"

ALL this I tried to explain to the New Beni's A.T. as soon as we reached his house.

He listened patiently, every now and then grunting or making vague motions with eyebrows or hands and shoulders. When I was through I knew that, if anything, he only thought me more cracked than he had before. First, he asked me if my fever was really bad. Hadn't I better go to bed and get a good rest? When I insisted that nothing would do me more good than to discuss the Mulahu and my immediate plans, the following conversation took place. I wrote it down in my logbook, in French, that very night, because I felt that much of what happened and was said that evening was going to be of the utmost importance to my quest.

"So," the A.T. began resignedly, "you really believe that this—this beast exists?"

"I certainly do. And I want to find it."

A grunt. Then: "You say you think it might be a fifth anthropoid . . ."

"That's what I strongly believe. Though it may be a yet unknown race of Gorilla; quite different, much mightier, infinitely rarer even than the Giant Gorilla of the Mountains—and, of course, much more powerful than the other three man-like apes, the Gibbon, the Chimpanzee and the Orang-utan."

"But how could such an extraordinary animal have escaped discovery? Isn't it improbable, to say the least? No, I'm sorry to contradict you, but I'm afraid it cannot be anything but a myth."

"So was the gorilla a myth, so were the Pygmies a myth, when Du Chaillu tried to tell the world about them. They laughed at

him. When he said he had taken pictures, but couldn't produce them because of an accident, you know he was publicly called a liar."

"Yes, yes, I know. But that was long ago."

"Not so long ago, really. Anyway, what about the Okapi? Stanley wrote that he had heard about it. But until a score of years ago it remained a legend, a superstition, didn't it? Even when Sir Harry Johnston discovered it, he only got hold of an Okapi skin—and wrote scientific papers calling the animal a jungle donkey. Remember? Then the legend—and the donkey—turned out to be a magnificent jungle giraffe. And I myself exploded the myth of its being practically extinct by proving, only a year ago, that there are great numbers of Okapis, both in this and in the Kibali and the Epulu jungles. In fact, I'm on the tracks of a new race of it—and I believe I'll prove that, too!"*

"All right, man. Don't get excited. But this Mulahu—if it exists—why should it have survived only in such a relatively small portion of the jungle?"

"How do I know? Perhaps it is because it lives in caves, great grottoes which are supposed to exist only in very few spots; such as the 'Hills of Fear'—and the 'Hills of Fever', perhaps. That's all I've managed to learn. . . ."

"Caves? Grottoes? In this jungle? Impossible. That's another tall story. You mustn't believe all that these black rascals tell you. Worse still, you seem to see in their words even more than they say. And, of all the superstitious, primitive, ignorant savages I've ever seen in the Congo, believe me, these are the worst bunch."

"Yet, by now I'm positive that there are big caves somewhere not too far from here. About the 'Hills of Fear', I've never managed to get a word of information out of any native. But about the others—the 'Hills of Fever'—I overheard a song once. It was long, sad, and beautiful. I didn't catch every word of it, but I know it told of many caves, some of them big enough to contain a whole tribe. That's where the natives went to hide when the Arab slave traders came up or down the Semliki river. All the raiders found were empty villages, which they burned; they never

* See *Great Mother Forest* (Hodder & Stoughton).

got a man or a woman, alive or dead, said the song. It spoke of great springs of clear, cool water, inside these caves; of great columns of glistening stone; of secret passages through which the hunters went to trap wild animals which found shelter in other, smaller caves, so supplying the tribe with abundant food throughout the weeks of their hiding. I recognized in the song the names of a good many antelopes and gazelles habitually 'bunking' there. Also mentioned repeatedly were Okapis, chimps, even elephants.

"But, of course, there were no Mulahu there, I don't suppose; otherwise the natives would have stayed well away from those caves, even at the cost of being raided by all the slave traders of Africa."

"Did they tell you where these caves are—where these co-called 'Hills of Fever' are supposed to be situated? And what has 'Fever' to do with hills?"

"The song repeated over and over again '*Mlima ya Homa*'. Doesn't that mean Mountains (or Hills) of Fever? My impression, for what it is worth, is that the name comes from the many sicknesses festering the shores of the Semliki. And that the hills should be somewhere between this new road of yours and the river. Here, let's say." And I made on the map a little round mark which is still visible on it.

"D'you mean in my own territory? Something as spectacular as you say practically under my nose? Wouldn't the natives have told me? Believe me, it's another myth, legend, or what have you—bunk, anyway. Otherwise, why all this mystery?"

"You remember what you yourself told me both about your not having time to explore the jungle just for the fun of it, and about how superstitious your natives are? Well, one old man, a *Kapita* of Chief Mutoni, even told me in confidence that his father was one of the last individuals to know how to get there. Apparently, before dying, he told this eldest son that the paths to the caves, even their entrances, had long since been reconquered and completely hidden by the jungle. And he made him swear that he would never try, nor allow anybody else to try, to find these caves again. Something about not disturbing the spirits which now inhabit them."

"Oh, yes. Those old spirits are always good for an excuse." He chuckled, shook his head. "I'm sorry. You're wasting your time. You will spend a fortune and ruin your health, but you'll never find this Mulahu. No more than you'll find those bloody hills—of Fear or of Fever. By the way, let me ask you again, how's *your* fever?"

"Worse, now, thanks. All this wonderful encouragement you have given me has helped a great deal. But, say what you wish, what I'm acting on is much more than a hunch. And I'm mulish, you know. I'll find them, if it takes me years. If I fail, someone else will succeed. For, I tell you, they are no myth, any of these things. They exist—the hills, the caves, and the Mulahu!"

My ears whistled sorely with the combined effect of too much malaria and too much quinine. I was about to cover them to protect them against the A.T.'s inevitable new burst of loud laughter. Instead, just as he had let me see for myself how right he had been in his scorn for his so-called house, his so-called drinks and the quantity of information his so-called brain could offer, so now he proceeded to show me, in the manner he considered most certain and convincing, what he thought about my so-called fifth anthropoid.

"Charles!" he called.

His table boy came in. Charles had the brightest, happiest face I had yet seen in Beni. His huge mouth seemed to be set in a permanent grin which stretched it from ear to ear. His name, as well as his polite manners, proved he had been educated in a mission. His clothes, old now and slightly exaggerated in colour, but of good origin, showed that he had lived in one of the Congo's biggest towns.

"Yes, Bwana," he giggled happily.

"Tell me," said the A.T. "Did you ever hear of anything called the Mulahu? The Bwana here says . . ."

But the boy's face had collapsed. Before the last four words were pronounced, a strangled little cry had come out of his throat. As he hastily retreated from the room, he actually staggered. Had his head been suddenly conked with a bottle, the transformation couldn't have been *more* radical. Nor more startling.

ANOTHER BELIEVER

THE intensity of Charles' queer behaviour surprised even me. It left his master completely nonplussed.

"I—I'll be darned," he grumbled a couple of times. Then, "Ehi, Charles!" he shouted once more.

There were a few minutes of complete silence. Then another boy I hadn't seen before appeared—reluctantly, his eyes frightened, his lips trembling. Charles, he stuttered, wasn't around.

The A.T. looked at me, then at the boy. He couldn't believe his ears. Then he thought of something. "Go see if Dr. Morais is at the infirmary," he ordered the boy. "Ask him to come here at once, if he can."

The boy nodded and hurriedly disappeared.

"The doctor," explained the A.T., "was the first white ever to come and work around here—some fifteen years ago. If this Mulahu is anything more than a silly superstition of the natives, Morais is the one to know." He took his time pouring another drink for us, preparing one for the doctor. All the while, he grumbled something I couldn't hear, or shook his head as if to clear it.

Presently the doctor joined us. His thick hair looked even whiter against the deep tan of his kind, fine face. His light blue eyes commanded respect and confidence. I liked him at once. He shook my hand firmly. His hand lingered a second in mine, surprised at finding it so hot and clammy. I'm sure that his glance at my face told him that I was sick, worried—but also that I was hoping for more than a thermometer and some pills from him.

In fact, all at once I felt—well, excited. Some sixth sense whispered to me that here was the man I had been looking for, one—probably the only one—who would listen seriously to what I had

in mind, and help me. It may seem silly to say this now, but I was sure. I positively knew, that this pleasant, scientifically-minded old colonial was going to say something of great value to me, something that would mean the turning point of my quest.

To begin with, the mention of the Mulahu didn't produce even a smile from him. While I briefly repeated to him all I had said to the A.T., he often nodded, in thoughtful assent.

"You're right," he said when I finished. "The animal exists; I have no doubt about that. Though, it must be extremely rare. And—inhabiting caves or not (I haven't the slightest idea whether this is true or not)—it must be surviving only in a very limited part of the jungle. No native dares to penetrate this area; no white has reached it as yet. Except one, I believe; but he died of it. Quite a while ago, without leaving any record."

Before I could ask him what he meant by his last words, he put a question to me. "What composite picture of the animal have you built in your mind—I mean, from all these bits of information you have been collecting so persistently here and there?"

As matter-of-factly as possible, I told him. My conception was of a great ape, which had a stature of seven or eight feet—about a foot, or a foot and a half, taller than my record Giant Gorilla. Weight in proportion (something around 800 pounds); a formidable strength, a constant ill temper, ready to burst, at the slightest provocation or intrusion, into fearful wrath. About the Mulahu's head I had gathered only contradictory hints. I had heard (and not believed for a moment) that it looked like a cow's. In other places, it was said to be similar to that of a goat, of a man, of a gorilla. I felt that the latter was the only plausible comparison.

But, about one of the Mulahu's peculiarities, the intelligence I had gathered was unanimous—the curtain of long white hair falling down from his forehead. It was rumoured to be so thick that the animal couldn't see through it very well, especially in that permanent dimness of his habitat. The only way he could properly view and survey another living being, was said to be to turn his back to it, go down on all fours, and look backward from under his belly, through the space between his arms and his legs. For only in that position would the curtain hang out of the way of his sight.

"Right," exclaimed the doctor. "Very much the same picture I have succeeded in piecing together myself throughout all these years."

"Bah!" exploded the A.T. "Honestly, I've never heard such nonsense. But—but, even suppose that something like this so-called Mulahu exists; suppose, too, that it has a quasi-human intelligence, as you two say; then, instead of going to all the trouble of getting down to such an uncomfortable, humiliating posture—hell, wouldn't the beast be smart enough to lift up or to part that curtain of hair with his hands, while standing up?"

"Then," answered Dr. Morais, "he would have his two hands occupied—or one, at least. How could he grapple with an adversary? The moment the fight started, the curtain would fall, dim his sight—just when he needs it most."

"And," retorted the A.T., "how could he grapple with an adversary—let's say, grab and kill a man—while down on all fours and turning his back to the intruder?"

There was something in that.

"On the other hand," I said, "the Mulahu doesn't have to grab a native to kill him. The moment a man's eyes meet those of the Mulahu, the man dies at once—without being touched."

I let the Administrator have his belly laugh. Why not? I, too, had felt like laughing, the first few times I had heard this tale. But that was a long while before. Since then, I had learned better than to disbelieve a thing simply because my eyes had not seen it yet.

Doctor Morais was even more tolerant. He smiled at the Administrator's exaggerated mirth. His eyes twinkled. But they soon became deeply interested again.

"There's something else," I went on. "They say that the body of a man killed by the sight of the Mulahu immediately becomes swollen, takes on a strange purple colour."

That was too much for the A.T. "And all," his voice boomed, "all because some damned monkey has looked at him from between its legs, eh?"

"Well," I said, "believe it or not, that's what your natives believe so strongly. That's why your own boy, Charles, almost fainted at the mention of the animal. That's why, throughout a

million square miles of jungle, natives of a hundred different tribes and races are terrified, more or less petrified, even at the mention of this beast."

"But why should anyone die, when he is not crushed, poisoned, nor even touched?"

"Because," I persisted, "the natives are so irrevocably convinced that they do not stand a chance. They believe in this as implicitly and thoroughly as they believe in light and darkness, in the rain and the wind, in the poison of a venomous snake and in the power of the leopard's claws."

Doctor Morais thoughtfully nodded.

"It must be something like that," he said, a hand held up to stop the A.T.'s protest. "Look here. You believe in the lethal properties of arsenic, don't you? You know how arsenic works? Maybe you have an idea of the taste it gives a drink?"

The Administrator said that, yes, he guessed he did, though only approximately.

"Well," the doctor went on. "Suppose I am in the infirmary, working at my table—the usual one under the shelves, you know, where I keep all medicines and poisons, including a couple of bottles of whisky. You come in from a safari. You're thirsty; I offer you a drink. While I mix it, my elbow upsets some phials. Their contents drop all around. But you've wanted that drink badly; you swallow it in one gulp—as you often do. Then you smack your lips in disgust. You make a face. You tell me the taste was funny. Alarmed, I look at the fallen bottles. 'Arsenic,' I say.

"You are a civilized man. You think you are smart, sophisticated, not easily influenced. But now, you are suddenly convinced that you have absorbed an undetermined, maybe a deadly quantity of arsenic. The first thing you know, you are sick. You suffer diabolical pains; you implore me to save your life."

"Well—yes, it might work that way."

"It would. But, let's go one step further; and remember, you are not a primitive savage, a child of nature made up of a mass of century-old superstitions. If I suddenly tell you, 'For heaven's sake. I see now it was only some salt, pure harmless salt, that fell into

your drink'—will you believe me without hesitation? Or what will you think?"

"I don't know. Probably I'd feel you were trying to take my mind off the arsenic in my stomach."

"Exactly! So, your original belief will only be strengthened. You'll imagine that your condition is even worse than you thought before. You'll go on suffering from arsenic poisoning—entirely imaginary, of course, but you will suffer hell. There is a chance that, regardless of what I say or do, you'll die of it."

It sounded plausible. Once the theory was applied to the natives' simple mentality, their natural awe of, and credulity for, the occult and supernatural, it became even more convincing. They realized that the superhumanly powerful Mulahu, with one effortless gesture, could crush them to death even after having been wounded by one of their pitiful little arrows or spears—if they had ever had the incredible daring to use their weapons. They were so certain of this, that not even that one gesture would be needed. If, despite their constant preoccupation in keeping well out of the way of the beast, they should happen to meet one face to face, their conscious and their subconscious reflexes would both act instantly, fatally. Even before the animal could touch them, the tremendous nervous shock would bring them immediate death.

Once the intruder was dead, the Mulahu—like the majority of non-carnivora—would immediately sense the end of danger, and go away without even bothering to touch the body of a foe who had ceased to be a foe and a possible threat.

Later, other natives might gather in great numbers, get together enough mass courage and, probably making a tremendous racket, search for the missing man. Upon finding and picking up the corpse, they would run as fast as possible out of reach of the Mulahu, to the safety of their village. There, examining the corpse and finding it intact, but purple and swollen because of congestion and damp heat, they would believe more strongly than ever that the Mulahu's eyes alone had been responsible for their friend's death—and for the colour and the dilation of the body.

(Of course, I thought fleetingly, all this wouldn't apply to me if ever I came face to face with a Mulahu, nor to any other white man.

We wouldn't be hampered by superstition. Even less hampered would be the good heavy rifle we should naturally have in hand at that moment, and know how to use. This thought was quite reassuring. But its comfort didn't last long.)

There was also something else, and this was more difficult to understand. Several times it had been confided to me that—though the corpses of the Mulahu's victims showed no mark of violence on them, Mulahu hairs were found stuck under the nails of their fingers and toes, in their mouth, nose and eyes. I asked the doctor what he thought of that. "Or, does it seem to you just an extra frill added by too excited imaginations?"

"Yes," he said. "And again, no. I wouldn't be surprised if this were an embroidery, but based upon at least one actual fact."

BWANA NYEKUNDU

"A WHILE ago," continued the doctor, "I mentioned that perhaps one white man had succeeded in reaching the Mulahu's secret haunts. If anyone ever did, it was an Australian photographer and big-game hunter. He came around here a couple of years after me. That's about thirteen years ago, during the Great War.

"He was the only other white the Mayaka had seen at that time, but he got along well with them. He learned their language quite a bit; he went off with them for months at a time—hunting, taking pictures, collecting and preparing trophies. The Mayaka loved his fearlessness, his perpetual good humour, his toughness. They were impressed by his exceptional stature and strength and marksmanship. They would go through fire for him. Bwana Nyekundu they affectionately called him, because of his flaming red head. His real name was Bob Kindreick, if I remember correctly.

"One day some hunters brought him to me—dead, which he had evidently been for several days. I had little African experience, then, and you can imagine what happens to a corpse, in this climate. At any rate, my first thought was that he had died of apoplexy and smashed his cranium in falling against a tree trunk. But a Mayaka who believed he owed me his life, remained behind. He was scared stiff. When we were left alone, he came out with his story—which I have never had occasion to mention before today."

Now we were getting somewhere. Even the A.T. was speechless, listening intently. The doctor, after a brief pause of recollection went ahead.

"According to this native, the Australian had expired four days before. He had been killed. Killed by a Mulahu whom he had

approached against his guide's frantic supplications, and despite the guide's instant flight. That's how I first heard of the animal and got interested in it.

"And," he told the A.T., "that's how there came to be that mound surmounted by a stone cross just behind your office in Old Beni."

At this point, the boy I had seen before timidly entered to announce that dinner was ready. If the A.T. noticed that Charles had not come back, he didn't show it. He just nodded absent-mindedly. We followed the boy to the next room. The moment the soup had been served and the boy had retired, the doctor continued.

His opinion was that the talk about the hairs might have grown out of that one case—or at least found strong confirmation in it. For the Australian *had* some very coarse, large, long white hairs clasped between his teeth and others stuck under two of his fingernails.

The way the doctor managed to reconstruct the events, this was what might have happened.

How, when and where the Australian had managed to pick up the tracks of a Mulahu, Dr. Morais had not been able to ascertain from the still distracted Mayaka. But there was no doubt that Bwana Nyekundu, by chance or by sheer persistence, had managed it. When the other natives had refused to budge another inch, he had succeeded in persuading his best guide to continue with him. When the Mayaka, frozen with terror, had himself become unable to take another step and begged him to get away, he had gone ahead alone.

"Probably he thought he was going to get some pictures that would make him famous and bring him a fortune.

"The Mulahu, either down on all fours or perhaps already standing on its hind legs, must have been waiting for him, prepared for instant action, but still invisible behind a curtain of vegetation.

"Possibly, stunned for once to see a human being daring to draw so near, the monster may have hesitated a second or two. Or it simply waited long enough for the man to come within reach of its formidable arms. Be that as it may, my impression is that the

Australian sensed the danger, was looking around, or to the ground for footprints, when those long arms shot out, grabbed and imprisoned him. Even then, during the few seconds before his head was crushed, he put up a frantic struggle, desperately trying with tooth and hands to free himself—to no avail, of course.

"Hence the few hairs which came with his body, the body which the Mulahu naturally dropped the moment it felt there was no life left in it. Hence, too, the legend emerged—from the reports of the guide and his companions after they had mustered enough courage to go back and fetch Bwana Nyekundu's remains; a legend which, naturally, has been distorted and magnified in the process of its being spread from hunter to hunter, from tribe to tribe, all the way to the jungle's farthest reaches. . . ."

I haven't the slightest idea what else we ate that evening, nor how long the dinner lasted. I had forgotten all about malaria, too. And the A.T. was no longer even trying to crack jokes or to voice his scepticism. In that mud house, in New Beni, with the jungle then still pressing around from all sides, it wasn't easy not to identify ourselves with the fate which had befallen that brave, unfortunate, young man a few years before, just a short distance from where we were sitting.

The A.T. and I asked the same question at the same time: "But wasn't the Australian armed?"

"Stupid of me," replied the doctor. "Of course he was—always. I shouldn't have left out the fact that this Mayaka also brought back the man's heavy rifle. A big Mauser it was—with the magazine still fully loaded. I know this because I unloaded it myself before sending it, with his smashed camera and his other effects, to the District Commissioner. The safety catch was off. That's as far as the poor devil was able to get."

The A.T. screwed up his eyes. "Listen, Morais. You are normally a very precise fellow. But now you have just said you had guessed that this—what's his name?—this Australian, was taking pictures. How could he handle his rifle at the same time—even if he only got as far as putting off the safety catch at the last minute? And why not shoot first, then take pictures?"

The doctor made a helpless gesture. "You know how thick the

vegetation is in this jungle. Eight, ten feet away, you don't see a thing. And the Mayaka was scared stiff, probably had his eyes tightly closed. For a second or so he stood there; then he ran off. All he could tell me was that when Bwana Nyekundu grumbled with impatience and disappeared ahead, he had his little camera hanging from his neck, as usual, and the rifle held in readiness in both hands, as he always did when approaching dangerous game. And, believe me, he could be lightning fast with that gun. And with his camera, too."

"Then," I asked, "not even the Mayaka could say much about what actually happened?"

"Very little. All he knew for certain, when he refused to advance another step, was that the Mulahu's tracks were only a few minutes old. While running away, he heard no shots—only a few stifled cries and grunts, a brief but noisy thrashing around and a resounding crack, as of a branch being snapped off. When he returned with his companions, after making sure that there weren't any fresh tracks around, they found Bwana Nyekundu just as they brought him to me. His camera was a few feet away, reduced to a pancake and without its strap. The rifle was also nearby—in two pieces."

"A big Mauser—in two pieces? What do you mean?"

"I don't think I'll ever forget it. It had been snapped in two, in the same way that I could break on my knee a small child's toy gun made of tin and papier maché. I tell you, it was frightening only to think of the tremendous strength, the devastating fury of that beast. And of the almost human cunning which had controlled, directed, unleashed them . . ."

"Then," I said, "all that remains as—as proof, let's say, are those hairs? Do you still have them?"

"I would have liked to send them to Europe for analysis, but this Mayaka never gave me a chance. There were only five or six of them, and he begged me to let him keep them. After all, they were all he got out of the whole adventure. To him they were terribly important; and he certainly had deserved them. In fact, he became quite a personage, because of these talismans, and of his being the only hunter known to have approached a Mulahu."

"Where does he live?"

"He doesn't. He has been dead for a few years. But don't be too disappointed; his son is sure to have inherited those hairs. You should try to make friends with him—he is a nice, brave young man. Incidentally, he is the one Mayaka I know of who has volunteered for the *Force Publique* up to now. He did a good job there, too, for they made him a sergeant or corporal, or something. He is the only native who might be of any serious help to you. In his soldier's days, he travelled all over the Congo, and was in close contact with whites for several years. He is as broad-minded and reliable as they come. I believe he has plenty of authority, too. And, let me tell you again, he is fearless—that is, as fearless as I have ever known a native from these parts to be."

And so it was that I first heard the name of "Headman Amisi, ex-corporal in the *Force Publique*", as he was later to be described in the official letter I mentioned before.

In fact, at the cost of jumping ahead of my story, I think that this letter should be produced here and now. It might be of no little assistance in understanding the incidents I am going to relate, as well as the locale, the atmosphere, the circumstances which made them not only possible, but inevitable.

This creased, discoloured old official letter is signed by the Belgian Administrateur Territorial of the Babira-Walese tribes of the Central Congo. And he pounded it out himself, on his tired little portable typewriter, in the corrugated iron-roofed mud house which was really all he had for an office in that year of 1933.

Later on, this very nice gentleman explained to me that, when he wrote this communication, he didn't have the slightest idea where I was. He didn't even know whether I was still alive—or lost and dead in the interior of the jungle, as the usually well-informed native grapevine had suggested. That's why he had to address the message to Poste Restante, (General Delivery), Irumu—the same little post in which he was writing it.

"You see, don't you, that I *had* to write you that message. If by some miracle you were rescued, some day or other it would be forwarded to you; and you would clear the matter up for me—as much as possible anyway. Otherwise, well, you know how it is.

Had my superiors made a rumpus, I could have always produced the carbon, and shown that I had been on my toes."

The translation of the letter, the original of which is reproduced in the illustrations, reads as follows (the italics being mine):

"My dear Commander,

Natives of the subdistrict of the Mayaka (Apaligbo) inform us that several villages have been assisting you for more than 3 months in the research on and hunt for the antelope Soli; *and that a group of seven natives and pygmies led by Headman Amisi, ex-corporal in the Force Publique, have disappeared or died in the region which lies toward the Esay, in the prohibited hunting territories of the Ituri.*

This matter is creating the deepest emotion among our natives.

We would appreciate it if you would supply us with all useful information concerning this matter.

Were Headman Amisi and his men in your service?

Please accept, Sir, the expression of our most distinguished sentiments.

Signature

The Territorial Administrator of the Babira-Walese.

P.S. The natives of Siku complain that one of your boys, named Kommanda* (race Bambuba, Chief Kalume, Territory of Beni) has abducted from the village of Siku the woman Mayomba, married to a native of Headman Amisi. Also the woman Amendobo, married to a native of Headman Kokola. Could we ask you to see to it that these women are returned to their homes?"

★ ★ ★

There are two points in this document on which I would like to focus special attention. One is that the surmise that Headman Amisi had led "a group of seven natives and pygmies" proved to be far more simple than the actual truth, which is not surprising, if one

* Not to be confused, despite the apparent similarity of the names, with Kamanda, a lovable young Mangbetu who, many years later, became my wife's little "page", and whose adventures I have recounted in two books: *Kamanda* (Harrap) and *Kamanda on Safari* (McBride).

bears in mind truth's not exceptional tendency to be stranger, more far-fetched than any fiction.

The second point is that equally hasty and unfair in its implication was the P.S. For anyone reading it may get the impression that my boy, Kommanda, was a dissolute black Don Juan, bent only upon abducting other men's wives, while his own Bwana was up to his neck in a hard, dangerous undertaking. This would be a purely libellous judgment on a faithful, brave man who—regardless of what personal favours he may have incidentally obtained from the dark-skinned belles in question—was known to have held his duty toward me foremost in his mind and heart—throughout his many years in my service.

KOMMANDA

I FIRST set my eyes on Kommanda the day after my long talk with Dr. Morais and the A.T.—just while I was discussing with the latter the final details of the journey I was about to undertake. (I intended to set out immediately, even though my temperature, instead of dropping out of sight after the usual three days, was still in me, and climbing up.)

As we stood talking in the middle of the new “so-called road”, I saw a wild-looking hunter come toward us. But for a bit of loin-cloth, he was stark naked. His thick hair was encrusted with a sort of wig of dried red mud. Bashfully, he approached; tentatively, he lifted his spear and bow, in respectful salutation; and quickly, as if to get over an unpleasant task, he delivered his message. He said that Charles, speeding toward a far village where his mother was dying, had met him, Kommanda, and asked him to come and say to the Administrator that he, Charles, was sorry to have had to go away in such a hurry and without permission. There was a pause. Timid glances darted from his eyes to my face and to that of the A.T., as if to make sure that both of us believed him.

“His mother, my eye,” the Administrator quietly exploded in French. “It’s all because of my asking him about the . . . about that animal. After he has been with me for three years! He will never come back, either. The damn fool . . .”

Kommanda was obviously waiting for us to stop talking, in order to take the speediest leave possible. But when the A.T. dismissed him with a word of thanks, he didn’t move. I turned my head to see what had so thoroughly caught his attention. With awed admiration, Kommanda was staring at a group of my smartly uniformed boys, at the handfuls of copper coins they were nonchalantly dishing

out to local natives, to buy from them basket upon basket of food—even a goat!

It wasn't difficult to imagine what emotions were wrestling in Kommanda's mind. On the one hand there was the alarming piece of news—certainly imparted to him by the fleeing Charles—that I was interested in the Mulahu. On the other, there was the terrific temptation of those uniforms, of so much money, together with luxuries and food, and all within easy reach, without his having to go away from his own part of the country.

His eyes, a speculative look in them, met mine; and I knew he liked me, on the whole; at least as much as I liked him—despite the aura of acrid, sweaty smell which emanated from his unkempt body.

I already had all the boys I wanted. They were good, loyal boys who took wonderful care of me. But they would be practically helpless once we went deep into that jungle. What I needed badly was an experienced hunter who knew it well, a reliable guide who had been born and had grown up in that particular section of it. Kommanda seemed to fill the bill perfectly. He wasn't a Mayaka, but he was almost as good for my purpose, because he belonged to the Bambuba race, the Mayaka's good neighbours and hereditary allies.

I didn't show too much eagerness, knowing that its effect would be just the opposite of what I wanted. Instead, as soon as the A.T. had left me to return to his work, I said to Kommanda that I would probably be seeing him soon again, for I was about to move to his tribe's territories, and beyond them. My purpose was to hunt, and possibly to capture a very, very rare animal, which I knew lived in the vicinity and which no other Bwana had captured alive as yet. I would remain there a long time, I said, and hunt, and hunt, until I got hold of at least one young specimen. Then the natives who had helped me would receive such rich gifts as they had never dreamed of.

"What—what is the animal?" he asked. His muscles were tense. He was poised for instant flight.

"The antelope Soli," I said with all the candour I could muster. "You know it, don't you?"

The transformation was dramatic. Just the opposite of the one

undergone the day before by Charles at the mention of the Mulahu. Kommanda actually leapt in the air. Of course, he knew the Soli, and where it could be found. He even thought he could work out how to capture a young one. He looked like a chained puppy which expected to be whipped and suddenly discovers that the chain has vanished, that what appeared as a threatening punishment is a saucer of rich, warm milk, instead.

Immediately, he offered to get me good porters, to take me from New Beni to the village of Chief Kalume. From there, he would guide me into the depths of the jungle where the Mayaka, whom he would make my friends, had their hunting villages. Then further, on and on, for as long as necessary, until I found and got the antelope Soli I wanted. Headman Amisi, he added, was like a brother to him; he, too, would help.

Two minutes later, Kommanda was taken by my boys to a nearby stream. Two hours later, a pair of scissors, a hard brush and a big cake of carbolie soap had accomplished miscellaneous miracles, the sum total of which was quite agreeable, particularly to my nostrils. A shining new uniform completed the startling transformation, and Kommanda strutted through New Beni amid the gasping exclamations of wondrous admiration from the local debutantes.

Two days later, hundreds of porters, magically produced by Kommanda, transferred all the expedition's baggage to the village of Chief Kalume. There, other men were already beginning to build the huts in which, before definitely abandoning the so-called road, I was to store, for the time being, all but the most urgently indispensable equipment.

Two weeks more, and our reduced safari, a nervous, elastic group of picked, lightly-loaded men, concluded its twenty-second hour of march from Chief Kalume's village. Kommanda let out a yell of announcement, the men behind me repeated it; another yell answered from the denseness ahead, and we entered into the hut-surrounded clearing of Headman Amisi's principal village.

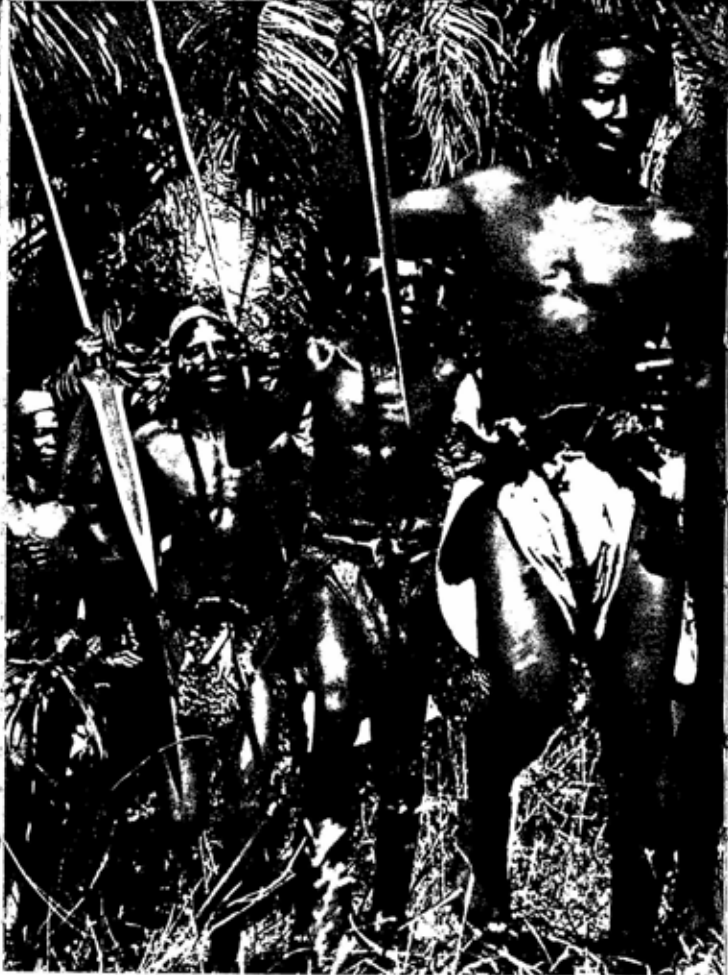
While the Bambuba porters put down their loads, the wide-eyed Mayaka remained tightly, silently packed behind a solemn, doubtful-looking Amisi. But Kommanda stepped forward and, standing

Chief Mutoni.



Kommanda (*carrying rifle*) wearing the author's uniform.





Gatti's natives abruptly refused to go further after reaching the outskirts of the Mulahu territory.

between the two groups, launched into a long introductory speech in Mayaka dialect. Whatever he said seemed to dispel all suspicions and fears. As soon as it ended, Headman Amisi, smiling pleasantly, advanced to shake hands with me. The crowd surged forward, shouted a welcome to me and exchanged greetings with the porters.

At long last, there I was, at the border of that mysterious unexplored country of which I had dreamed for so many years. Except for that Australian (for whose soul I was beginning to feel a strong brotherly affinity), and except perhaps for a very enterprising official or two, no white man was known to have penetrated that far into this jungle. And most certainly, again with the exception of the Australian, no one had ever gone a step further than that clearing.

Little as I knew it then, the place was not much more than a day's march from the spot where, in a few years' time, I was to carve out of the completely virgin jungle another, much larger clearing in which to build a huge, most comfortable and wonderful Base Camp. *Tzamboho*,* it was to be called by the pygmies, "The Beautiful Clearing". It was to be from there that I would at last manage to make several of my dreams come true (thereby demonstrating a few more times that some of the myths of yesterday are nothing but the actual, indisputable facts of tomorrow).

As I was talking with Amisi, I should have felt some sense of gratification and accomplishment—for having come so much nearer to my goal; for being there talking, at long last, with the son of the only native known to have actually followed the Mulahu's tracks; with the very man who held that unique tangible evidence of the Mulahu's existence—five or six of the long, coarse hairs from the curtain which falls down from a Mulahu's forehead. . . .

Instead, my ears roared, my eyes played tricks, my stomach heaved. I just had time to think that my beastly temperature must be leaping out of the thermometer's wrong end. Then the whole friendly, noisy clearing began to spin round faster and faster. The hard-packed ground flew up at me. I collapsed.

* *Great Mother Forest* (Hodder & Stoughton). Also, *Exploring We Would Go*, by Ellen Gatti (Hale).

ANOTHER "MYTH" UNMASKED

ALMOST two months later, I was sitting, for the first time, on a terrace of the Re Umberto Hospital in Cairo.

Near me stood an old friend of mine, Dr. Patamia. I hadn't seen him for years, outside a more or less recent nightmare in which he had appeared to me, surrounded by six or seven other men in white with stethoscopes, to whom he was talking in his usual rich Sicilian voice. But I vaguely remembered this voice being very serious and grave. "We've tried everything," I thought he had said. "But, he is almost gone, anyway. Why not try some injections of that Atebrine we've just received from Germany? Can't do any harm. Might do some good."

It had. It had pulled me up from that interminable nightmare, from that crazily burning temperature, from atrocious spasms of vomiting, from mad deliriums, from throat-lacerating, uncontrollable shrieks . . . out of all those horrible miseries, and out to that sun-flooded terrace.

"Was it blackwater, doctor?"

"Yes. You're all right now, but you shouldn't talk much. Still too weak."

"I certainly am," I admitted, letting my eyes close behind the dark glasses, surprised at the sound of my own voice, my whole body feeling fleshless, nerveless, almost boneless. "But, two things, please. First, a million thanks to you. Second, how do I happen to be here?"

I would have liked to add that all I remembered was Amisi's clearing (but he wouldn't know what in hell I was talking about); Dr. Morais fussing about me while I bounced on a *typoye* (but he wouldn't know, not here in Cairo, that a *typoye* is a comfortable

chair fastened to two bamboo poles and carried by four natives); the oven-like cubicle of a cabin of a Nile river boat (How had I got there? Why had the paddle-boat stopped for so long at that stink-hole, Khartoum?); the wailing of an ambulance; nurses silently stretching a screen around my bed; a doctor's voice speaking on a phone nearby ("No. Better keep his luggage at the Consulate. . . . No. I'm afraid he won't need it any more.") Those flashes—and that consultation about using me for a guinea pig for a new German product (thank God they had)—were all I remembered. Not much; and I didn't have the strength to tell any of it.

Dr. Patamia knew this. "In a few days, I'll tell you anything you want. Now, back to bed; this sun is too strong for you. Nurse!"

I was too weak to protest. I could only murmur another "Thanks". *But I must find out. Cannot let everything go, be lost, just because I had blackwater.* . . . By then I was back in bed and "blissfully asleep", as they say.

A few days later, I found out all I wanted to. A letter from Dr. Morais helped me a great deal. Evidently, Kommanda and Amisi had been marvellous. By mobilizing the entire village, they had had me carried by relays of men, at a fast trot, to Beni. There, Dr. Morais had taken full charge. He had given me a hypo, had climbed up next to me into one of the first trucks to run the whole length of the so-called road from New Beni to Irumu. Then he had obtained the permit to take me across the Sudan border, all the way to Rejaf, on the Nile, delivered me to the Captain of the river boat (the only European aboard), and got from him the promise to try, at least, to get me to Cairo, the only place where I could get proper treatment—if I could be kept alive until then, that is.

"Now," the letter continued, "just get well. Don't worry about anything."

Kommanda and Amisi, said the letter, had moved all the equipment from the road to the latter's village, where everything was stored properly, with Kommanda in constant watch over its safety. Dr. Morais would continue to pay him his salary and *pocho* (the allowance for the purchase of weekly food), on my behalf.

"If you possibly can," concluded the good doctor, "forget about the damned Mulahu; it seems to bring only misfortune, death and

disaster. If not (and of course you won't), take your time, at least. Get really well before coming back again to abuse that crocodile's constitution of yours. Take no less than a year, two if you possibly can. Keep this in mind: I have seen very, very few strong people get over *one* blackwater; but none who have survived a second attack—not ever. If you return too soon, you are bound to get another; and then, good-bye to your wretched Mulahu, and to your good self, too. Ask Dr. Patamia—who is a real expert on tropical diseases. He'll tell you the same. Remember: at least one year, possibly two."

They were both right. It took me more than a year to recover from that worst of all *homas*, the blackwater, into which my chronic, badly mistreated malaria had turned so violently, at such an inopportune moment.

Then I had to make a quick trip to America. There I met the girl of my life. The same day, we decided to get married at the earliest possible opportunity and to return to Africa together.

But, talking of *homas*—during the time I was away, another myth was shown to be a fact. The *Mlima ya Homa* were located; and, sure enough, on the slopes of these Hills of Fever, great caves were discovered.

They were not to be properly explored for a long time to come. But, beginning in 1943, some eleven years later, D. J. B. Ruscart, a geological engineer, discovered no less than twenty-six of these grottoes, some of them of enormous size and unimaginable beauty. A good many others are still to be explored even at the time of my writing. But those whose existence has been fully revealed are everything that the old Walese song had described—and much more. Matupi, Ikolongi, Yolohafiri (The Devil's Cave), Kwama Kwama, Tala-Tala and twenty-one other grottoes have now been visited by many tourists—and, as soon as the shocking turmoil in the Congo subsides, will be the delight of thousands of further visitors. They are easy to reach, too, as all one has to do is to drive some ten miles off the Beni-Irumu highway—on a recently carved-out branch road, which starts eastward from the very village of Chief Mutoni (or Mtoni) where so many years ago I overheard that song and spoke to that old *kapita* of his.

As that *kapita* had made me think, these hills, known today also by the name of Mt. Hoyo (from the peak in which they culminate), are located between the main road and the Semliki. Giant stalagmites and stalactites; magnificent, 80 foot high waterfalls; galleries, columns, garlands, organ pipes; clear springs at the bottom of incredible wells—all contribute to make these caves one of the most beautiful sights of Central Africa.

Wild game of all kinds still frequent these majestic natural shelters and find protection in them during the wild equatorial storms. An abundance of fossils tends to show that the same has happened for centuries. And there are many signs that large numbers of human beings have occasionally inhabited some of these caves (particularly the "Queen of the Homas") for limited periods of time. There is not much doubt that these occasional inhabitants were the tribes from the Semliki shores seeking refuge whenever the Arab slave-traders raided the river.

As for the fact that these hills and caves (and, even more so, the Hills of Fear) have remained a secret and been believed to be no more than a legend for such a long time, it is quite illuminating to note that even today, when the Homa Hills have been conquered and tamed by the white man and, until a year ago, frequently visited without any ill effect by any amount of tourists, the local natives still dread them and will firmly refuse to approach the grottoes. Even in past months, when mutinous bands of what my old friend would have termed "the so-called *Force Publique*" terrorized, victimized and plundered the roadside villages, the inhabitants preferred to seek refuge in the depths of the jungle, with all the dangers and privations they knew they would encounter there.

Incidentally, it might be interesting to the lovers of glamour and romance to know why, when the long-denied existence of these hills and caves was finally proved, so much time and trouble was taken to reveal one grotto after the other, so much labour and money spent to clear up and even enlarge the entrance to each cave and to make the whole zone accessible by a special road. Scientific enthusiasm? No. Science is usually shorter of funds than an explorer, which is saying a lot. To attract tourists and their money? No, no; nothing as absurd as that.

INCREDIBLE CHANGES

THE real reason for the care taken over the hills and caves was the enormous quantities of *excrements de chauves-souris*, or to put it more bluntly, bats' guano, which lined the walls and covered the floor of the first caves found. The more the exploration progressed, the richer were the deposits found. In places they were as much as forty feet deep. The reserves of this prosaic but highly valuable product, so rich in phosphates, nitrogen and other important chemicals (and therefore a source of profitable drugs as well as an excellent garden fertilizer), are enormous. In the known and still unexplored caves, there are estimated to be some 50,000 tons, worth something like seven million dollars. This is another of the many sources of wealth which will again be exploited when peace and order finally return to the Congo.

Of course, it must have taken a great numbers of bats a very long time to accumulate such a treasure of agricultural blessings. And, as primitive natives usually consider bats to be incarnations of their dead, and therefore would not care particularly to share the same shelter with millions of them (neither would I, to be candid), two thoughts occurred to me: 1. no wonder the father of Chief Mutoni's *kapita* was so firm about keeping his people away from all those "spirits"; and, 2. what did the tribes do when compelled to hide there from raiding slave-traders—especially since they knew only too well, if not by our scientific name, that a bat's bite can cause the gravest cases of encephalomyelitis—or rabies?

The answer to the latter point might lie in the great black smudges of relatively recent origin, which are found on the walls of those caves which the tribes preferred as hiding places. They must have smoked the bats out, and kept the fires going throughout their stay.

This would not have been very difficult, with the endless amounts of damp firewood which the surrounding jungle put at their disposal, just outside each cave. When the danger had passed and the tribes returned to their burned-down villages, the bats must have moved back, too, from the other caves where they had found temporary refuge—and merrily resumed their guano production in their own factory.

Another thing which I have often wondered about is how the A.T. of New Beni took the news of this so-called discovery (as he undoubtedly named it) when it was brought to him, well before his transfer to another, distant province of the Congo.

As for Dr. Morais, I never saw him again, except once, quite a long while ago. By the time I got back to the Ituri, he had concluded his government service. But he was simply unable to go back to Belgium and settle in his little natal *patelin*. He remained in the Congo as the head of the medical department of a large mining concern. Up to the time, only a few years ago, when he died, he and I kept up a fitful but voluminous correspondence. To the end, he remained concerned not only with my life, which he had greatly helped to save, but also with my quest for the Mulahu, in which he had assisted me so powerfully, both by his invaluable information and by his solid sharing of my belief in the animal's existence.

In fact, it is also because of his warm, sustained interest in the matter and of my desire to keep him informed about every detail of it, that never a day passed without my jotting down at least some notes in my logbook; even during the several occasions when my chances of success appeared to be evaporating and my hopes to have reached their lowest ebb.

The first of these depressing occasions came when with Ellen, my wife, I drove all the way from Nairobi to Beni and to Irumu. Think of what that word "drove" meant to me. Only about three years had gone by since I had had to march all the way from Lake Edward to Old Beni and New Beni. Just a few months more than two years had passed since I had collapsed in Amisi's clearing. And now it was almost no trouble to come back with a box-body (a

prehistoric East African kind of estate car) and two fairly heavily loaded lorries—well, trucks.

At points, the going was still pretty rugged. At others, in comparison with some of Uganda's roads, this one was still very much "so-called". But you could travel on it, even go from a much magnified Beni to a quadrupled Irumu, and back, all in the same day.

The few, lonely natives we met on the road were still frightened by the approach of a vehicle and unaccustomed to being addressed by strangers. At the first glance of either vehicle or strangers, they would plunge into the thick vegetation and disappear from sight, unwilling to reveal themselves, regardless of my friendly talk and what I offered to them in their own language.

The villages flanking the road had been expanded and improved a great deal. Generally, they were orderly and well kept. A stream of humanity would flow out of all huts the moment we stopped. There, in their own place, and in such numbers, men, women, even children weren't so scared as they had been on the road. As soon as a Chief, a *Kapita*, or anybody recognized me, they all came slowly around, quickly forgot their shyness and roared with laughter at the silliest joke, applauded and danced at the first sign of a distribution of little presents—salt, cigarettes, sweets, pennies, anything.

In every way, the change made during those three years was wonderful; wonderful—and, to me, terribly depressing.

It was one thing to admire progress, to take full advantage of so many rapid advances made in such a short time. It was another, entirely different thing, to think of the disastrous effect these advances would have on the continuation of my various projects.

How could we any longer reasonably expect to find the new race of Okapi I had nosed out, to capture specimens of it, and of the Congo Bongo, the "mythical" Soli antelope, within a short distance of this new road—barely beyond sound-reach of the cars, the trucks, the buses which now used it as a matter of course, and with the help of natives who had suddenly changed so radically that they now barely noticed a plane flying over their heads?

I shall not forget something that happened on our first day back, while we were at Mutoni's village. I heard a plane coming from far

away and said to Ellen: "Watch them now. I bet they all run away."

The roar of the plane increased, and nobody paid the slightest attention to it. When it was just overhead, a few little children looked up, and jumped up and down, beating their hands, chattering with some animation. Mutoni just looked up: "*Ndege*", he said with the utmost indifference. "Passes every week." And he resumed his conversation about how many baskets of manioc flour he could gather for me during the next week—and how much he should make me pay for them.

I seemed to be the only one surprised by that plane—the first I had seen flying over the jungle—in the general direction of the zone where Dr. Morais and I were sure that the Mulahu lived.

All at once, I felt as if for years I had been chasing nothing but a rainbow. And now even the rainbow had vanished, fully dispelled by the hot sun of three years of rapid progress. It was deflating, disheartening, frightening; in fact, it seemed even laughable that I should hope to discover the greatest rarity—if not of all time, certainly of today—a legendary primeval monster . . . just beneath the regular route of a scheduled weekly plane.

In all probability, even those expectations which I could most rely on, such as my certainty of finding my old equipment in order and Kommanda and Amisi waiting for me, had become no more solid than a dream—all reality having been knocked out of them by this unexpected enormous change undergone by everything and everybody.

I asked Mutoni: "Have you seen Amisi recently? Or Kommanda?"

"*Badu*", he said, again with utter indifference.

Now, *badu*, literally, means—not yet, later on. Said with a shrug of the shoulders and a spreading out of hands palm-upwards, it acquires an untranslatable meaning of complete unconcern, as if the matter under discussion were totally unimportant and the word were being used purely for politeness, instead of saying, "And who cares a damn about that".

Well, I said to myself, probably a little shock treatment is what is needed by both Mutoni and myself. This time I didn't forewarn

Ellen, but I prepared myself for the usual ultra-drastring reactions of the chief and of everybody else around him.

I gulped. Then: "While I was away," I said, "has anybody else, black or white, been killed by—the Mulahu?"

Faces around us became a bit tense, yes. And Mutoni's eyes closed to slits. Also, there was a moment of complete silence and evident embarrassment. But nothing more than that. Nobody ran off; nobody even backed away. Then, poker-faced, the chief shrugged his shoulders and said one word:

"Badu."

10

A SAD DECISION

THE following morning our lowered morale began to revive, shortly after we had started along a narrow path through the thick jungle.

In a few minutes a blanket of silence enveloped the two of us, the guides supplied by Mutoni and the few porters who followed us. As, sweaty shadows gliding through the unending green dimness, we advanced through that untouched world of hostile vegetation, stenchy oppression and mysterious, barely audible, hidden movements—change, progress, modernity were soon forgotten.

Our spirits soared again a few hours later when, thoroughly exhausted, we entered a tiny, sun-drenched glade, and dropped on a dead trunk for a brief rest. A bird's call came from the opposite side. We would have been sure that it was the cry of a toucan, had not one of the guides near us promptly answered it as realistically. The vegetation parted, and Amisi and Kommanda appeared, followed by a little knot of hunters, all with spears held high in welcome, all with faces split by wide grins of sincere joy.

I shook eager hands—and noticed that Kommanda's uniform was a bit discoloured but spotlessly clean. I introduced Ellen and she shook gentle hands—while I noticed that no aroma emanated from Kommanda. I might find my old provisions of carbolic soap deeply depleted, but it was well worth it—and touching, too. We felt so relieved that fatigue dropped from our limbs, and at once we started off, in Indian file, following Kommanda and Amisi.

It seemed no time before we reached the latter's village. And there we got a royal welcome. There was a great deal of general yelling, laughing, milling around; and, of course, much more hand-shaking. Then we were guided to a spot in the shade, where a table

and some of my old camp-chairs were waiting for us, and the entire population of the village squatted down to the ground arranging itself in a wide semi-circle. It was clear that a speech was strongly indicated and keenly expected.

My Kingwana, the poor man's Swahili of the interior, was back in me, ungrammatical and limited in vocabulary as usual, but as easily fluent and effective as if I had never ceased practising it. It served me well in thanking everybody for taking me so quickly to the road and to the doctor, two years before. It evoked delighted exclamations when I gave a spirited version of my sickness and recovery, of my going to Merika, of my buying myself a wife there—even though I only hinted at the great number of goats I had had to pay her father for her. I also complimented Kommanda and Amisi for taking such good care of my equipment. Of course, every now and then I peppered my talk with jokes which, feeble as they might have been considered elsewhere, made everybody slap his neighbour's shoulders, or roll on the ground with mirth. Finally, I launched into the *pièce de résistance*—what my *Mwanamuke** and I were now planning to do.

I talked about the great house of poles and dried mud which I wanted to build for my *bibi*, about the Soli antelope which I must capture, about the different *Kabila* of okapis which I was after. But I had sense enough never to mention the Mulahu. Certainly I must not do so there, where (only a few miles from the so-changed world of the road) those men, women and children seemed to be not a bit different from what they were when I had last seen them. No, there, deep in the jungle, the Mulahu remained a subject not to be talked about, not even in the most casual manner. Not, at least, until I felt I was really well entrenched in the confidence and friendship of these good Mayaka.

Luckily, I had long since figured that the great ape shared at least a portion of the same habitat as the new races of *boocercus* and *ocuapia* I planned to track, study and capture. Nothing could have better justified our presence, nor given me a readier opportunity for roaming day after day through that dark and gloomy

* *Bibi* is the correct word for wife. But *Mwanamuke Yangu* can be used in friendly jest as one might say "my own woman".

jungle. Slowly but surely, the Mayaka hunters would get accustomed to me. Men, women and children; notables, sorcerers and craftsmen, all had a role to play in our big scheme. Before very long, we would learn their dialect well, understand their character better, get to know their psychology intimately.

From then on, the weekly pay we gave out in salt, tobacco and blankets was as extravagantly generous as the ration of food that caravans of Bambuba regularly brought up from the village of Chief Kalume, together with more and more instalments of the new equipment and provisions we had left there. And the prizes we promised for the day when a Soli or an Okapi was finally captured meant, almost, wealth in that primitive, still-untouched little world of perennial dimness, extreme poverty and incredible hardships.

As was to be expected, the grapevine took over, and the news spread to other villages far away. More and more Mayaka came to visit us, first at Amisi's clearing, and then, as soon as we started work on it, all the way to our own big base camp. Other hunters brought information about the *nyama* we were after, "nyama" being a very convenient word which covers any kind of meat cooking in the pot, and in general, all kinds of meat still on the hoof but potentially eatable—and what animal is not considered eatable by the Mayaka, I have yet to discover.

* * *

I will not speak of the many, many months it took us to reach the goals we had agreed on—as I have already related them in other books. All I feel should be said here is why my previous books have most carefully omitted mentioning the Mulahu—and why today I am giving a detailed report of this long drawn-out, exciting quest.

The first point is easily explained; I had a couple of purely egotistical reasons. It was my own quest, and it had cost me blood, to say the least. I didn't want to talk about it before completing it, before crowning it with success. On the one hand, I didn't want to be laughed at by the incredulous as long as I was unable to present sufficient proof to squash any doubt. On the other, I felt that—if and when I got such proofs—I ought to get full credit for my discovery, and so did not want to give out premature information

which might allow others to deprive me of it. As I said, a couple of purely egotistical (and, I admit, far from admirable) reasons.

But, despite all my mulishness, years were to go by, without my ever managing to get back again after this trip on to the tracks of the Mulahu. I was sure that the time for the final success had come in 1938, when my wife and I again went back to the Ituri, with my tenth Expedition, perhaps the best staffed, certainly the most splendidly equipped in my African career up to that time.

As soon as we had completed some urgent motion-picture assignments, I was determined that, towards the end of 1939, we would start an all-out, decisive effort towards our old goal. Instead, World War II came, and we barely managed to get back to America before the conflagration spread everywhere and would have made our return impossible. Of course, the six years of the war were not exactly the most appropriate time for undertaking exploratory journeys. Afterwards, compelling economic reasons made other jobs much more urgent and necessary than the luxury of a tremendously difficult, costly and financially unrewarding undertaking, of an essentially scientific character. Three more long expeditions (as I will later report) brought us back to Africa—but each time to other countries and with entirely different purposes.

Finally, there came that evening in the silent, big, Vermont house, and my finding again that 1933 letter from the long-since dead A.T. of Irumu. I shouldn't have been shocked—but I was. Good heavens, I said to myself, even if I can barely believe it myself, I am almost sixty. Phew! How could I ever expect to muster enough strength and stamina to start that fiendish quest all over again? Even if I thought I could, would I actually want to abandon everything else in order to plunge once more into that devilish jungle? What would my poor *bibi* say, who has already taken so much punishment from Africa—how would she feel if I were to reassume that heart-breaking search, that killing kind of life? After asking myself these questions a good many times, I had to come to a sad conclusion. Let's face it, I told myself; it would be simply suicide—no doubt about it.

Well, then, what was I to do? Under the circumstances it became increasingly clear to me that the least—and the only thing—I could

do was to unburden myself, at long last. My treasured secret had to be revealed, to give a chance to others—if they so wished—to pick up the trail where I had had to leave it. Needless to say, it was a hard, hard decision to take; but the only decent one, I felt. At any rate, I thought, even if I could not complete this particular undertaking, I ought to be content—and grateful—for having had (and fully enjoyed), my own moderate quota of the exploding of myths and proving them truths—such myths as the existence of the *ocuapia kibalensis* and the Congo Bongo. And such a myth as the second, always “absolutely fatal”, attack of blackwater, which I had suffered and survived.

No, I couldn't complain; for fate, providence, or whatever had permitted me to accomplish successfully a good share of my self-imposed mission (as a sort of reward to me and encouragement to others who might follow in my footsteps), just before the *débâcle* which the Mulahu—coupled with that worst of all *homa*—was to bring to our venture.

After all, if this had not been so, our Congo Bongo and our Okapi of the Kibali (both the first of their races ever to reach a civilized country), might have been swallowed, too, by the dramatic events that were to follow—just as the most valuable part of our equipment was to be destroyed and our dearest hopes shattered, and just as so many human lives were to be cut-off by a cruel fate, in a strange, almost incredible manner.

“CERTAIN, HORRIBLE DEATH . . . ”

BUT, to return to the bloody events of that distant year of 1933. . . . I cannot say that I hadn't been forewarned a sufficient number of times; too many times, in fact—until the warning had lost all its impact and become no more than a boring, tiresome repetition.

“Stop, Bwana! There is death, there!”

It happened every few days, and always in almost exactly the same manner.

I would be dragging my tired feet along a jungle's twisting animal-path, bending my aching back to squeeze under a big branch or an arch of thorny growth, belabouring my smarting lungs to try to keep up with the Pygmy or the Mayaka guide ahead of me. Some rustling sounds would be the only sign which revealed the presence of ten or twelve other hunters following me. Above and all around us, there would be nothing but the usual dimness, a sinister silence, and an overpowering lushness of the evergreen equatorial rain forest.

Suddenly, the man before me would halt. He would peer right and left and scrutinize the path ahead of him—what little could be seen of it. I would do the same. Never once did I discover an unusual sign, any change in the vegetation—not a blessed thing. Yet, the man would turn round, his face greyish, his spear held up.

“Stop, Bwana,” he would whisper. “Stop! We must!”

“Why on earth?”

He would shake his head, his face unsmiling, his eyes troubled. His spear would stay up, poised, as if ready to be used against any stubbornness on my part.



The author (*right*) greets Dr. Morais.

The powerful teeth of the giant gorilla which attacked Gatti and had to be killed.



DEUTEREC LA FEMME-ITUMU
Territoire d'Irumu
N° 434/TOR. (KAYAKA)

Irumu, le 31 Mai 1935

Monsieur le Commandant,

Des indigènes de la sous-chefverie des
Mayaka (Apaligbo) nous signalent que divers villages
vers secondat depuis plus de 3 mois dans la recherche
et la chasse des antilopes Soli - qu'un groupe de sept
personnes et de pygmées conduits par le notable Amiel
ex-Caporal de la Force Publique aurait disparu ou serait
dété dans la région vers l'Efay - dans la réserve de
chasse de l'Ituri?

Cette affaire cause un émoi bien vif
parmi nos indigènes.

Nous vous aurions gré de nous donner
tous les renseignements utiles concernant cette affaire.
Le notable Amiel et ses gens étaient-ils à votre service?

Veuillez agréer, Monsieur, l'expression
de nos sentiments bien distingués.

L'Administrateur Territorial
M. Abira-Walene,

Signature

Les indigènes de Eiku II se plaignent de ce que l'un de vos boys d'accom-
pagné par une femme (chef Palame, Territoire Deni) aurait enlevé, du
village de Eiku II la femme KAYAKA mariée à BORO indigène du notable
Amiel et la femme Amakoto mariée à un indigène du notable Kabela.
Pourrions nous vous demander de faire retirer ces femmes dans leurs
foyers.

A RESPECTUEUX EN COMMANDEMENT CAYE

Reste restante à I R U M U

The letter from the Administrator of Irumu inquiring about the seven
men who died in Mulahu territory.

"There is death, there," he would hiss in my ear. "Certain, horrible death."

No matter who happened to be the guide that day, the words would be the same, accompanied by the same unconsciously threatening gesture, said in the same hushed, urgent voice, with the same earnest conviction.

Turning to the men behind me gave me no help. Even my best friends stood as immobile, as aloof and as uncommunicative as so many bronze statues. Their eyes stared ahead as if hypnotized; or sometimes they darted lightning glances first to one side and then to the other, as if expecting a monster to materialize out of that green darkness which enveloped and choked us.

Occasionally, tired, frustrated, I would lose my temper. "*Pumbafu!*" I might snarl, then. "*Goi-goi!* All of you—and your fathers—and their fathers before them!"

"Fools. Worthless cowards. . . ." At any other time, these insults would have wounded them, burned into their pride. But not *there*. They were too desperately tense. My words didn't register; perhaps they didn't even hear me.

It would have been bad enough if the "there" had been marked by any difference that I could detect. But, as I have said, I could never notice a single difference, not even a new smell, an unusual spoor, a change of light, of altitude, of anything. There was exactly the same inextricable entanglement of over-luxuriant, over-drenched vegetation through which we had been painfully pushing our way for hours. We had not come to a clearing; we had not reached a ravine or the slope of a hill; we had not met a stream or a rivulet.

Yet, once more, I had come up against that invisible barrier, with the result that instead of my continuing to roam at will through that portion of the jungle, I would soon be compelled to go back on my tracks.

It meant that, if I attempted to disregard their warning—instead of the constant, comforting presence, the willing assistance of those men, I would have nothing; I would simply lose them. And what good would it do to me to defy them, to try to proceed alone through that infernal labyrinth—when I knew only too well

that, left to my own devices, I would be irreparably lost after some twenty yards?

It was infuriating. There was no way for me even to see what and where that barrier was; far less could I think of surmounting it by myself. Yet, time after time, I had to reckon with its unholy power of instantly transforming the usually so satisfactory response of my Africans, into the most stubborn blankness; their friendly talk into hostile silence; their normally respectful obedience into open rebellion.

"*Pumbafu! Goi-Goi!*" I thought that one of them, perhaps, might finally crack under the insults, accept the challenge, break away from the others and come ahead with me.

Instead: "There is death, there. Certain, horrible death." Just those stilted, scared words—and nothing more. Not one single step forward—for all the threats I managed to think of, for all the extravagant gifts I promised, for all the reasonable persuasion I tried.

It was exasperating, especially since I really felt that, in all other matters, I had earned the full confidence and friendship even of the most suspicious and primitive of these hunters. For months and months, now, we had been together and had extricated ourselves from many tight spots. We had shared hunger, risks, long marches and hard work. On more than one occasion Pygmies and Mayaka alike had shown splendid courage, true loyalty, fantastic endurance. On my side, I had done my best, treating them decently and generously. I had taken as good a care as I humanly could of their ills and troubles, and of those of their families. I had always considered them more as teachers and partners than as savages and paid help. Undoubtedly, solid ties of reciprocal liking and trust had grown up between us.

But, where did that leave me? When I least expected it, they started all over again that infuriating, simultaneous halting which nothing seemed to justify. Again came that horrified gasping all around me, those half-imploring, half-menacing words, those terrified glances. . . .

Every time, this sudden change shocked and enraged me more. I felt that once again I was nearing the haunts of my quarry, that I was almost within reach of the discovery which I considered more

thrilling than any other, a discovery which would make an important addition to human knowledge, and, incidentally, make my name famous. And once again I was, stumped—blocked by the abject terror which the sheer thought of the Mulahu inspired in those natives, checked by the unshakable grasp of their superstitions. "Certain, horrible death," indeed!

Of course, I couldn't foresee, then, that before very long those poor devils would prove to have been right. It never occurred to me that the very "certain, horrible death" which they had talked about so often, might, only too soon, whip some of them away, almost from under my eyes; nor that, during the process, an even more unpleasant, slower death would be hanging close over me—much closer, actually, than I care even to recall today.



After the female Congo Bongo we had captured was shipped to Europe, I still had, for a while, a plausible reason for continuing to wander as far as I could into the jungle. I wanted another Soli, I said; a young male who would play with her, keep her from being too homesick in the far country of the whites, and later become her mate. Amisi, his Mayaka hunters and Pygmies all understood my desire and easily sympathized with it. Yes, they agreed; *A mwanamuke* surely needed a *mwanamume*. And willingly they helped me to try to satisfy this need of nature—and to earn new riches for themselves.

But, despite all our efforts, the young male Soli who provided this plausible excuse refused to be caught. The promised new prizes—big ones—did not, therefore, materialize; the old ones had been spent, used up, soon forgotten. This led to difficulties, because the ambition of the African whose only home is the jungle is neither excessive nor very enduring. It was true that, for a good number of months, our men and their families had eaten abundantly of the food they liked most—which otherwise they seldom saw. It was true, too, that they had more blankets than they had ever dreamed of. They had also earned enough money to buy new wives. But, all this while, I had been driving them on to do more work than they had been accustomed, or had wanted, to do,

And, with all my talk about Okapis and Solis, I had, at the same time, been continuously, persistently pushing them in the direction of the prohibited territory they so much dreaded.

The Mulahu had not been mentioned once, but perhaps they were beginning to understand my object; or, perhaps, for all I knew, they had understood it the whole time—and were getting fed up with the whole business. At any rate, although there wasn't any specific turning point which I noticed, the atmosphere seemed, suddenly, to have altered, as if brought about by a subtle change of wind. Then, it deteriorated more and more, with significant speed; until I realized that too many hunters were declaring themselves sick, or too tired, or too busy to come to the jungle with me.

One of the notables gave me a long talk, trying to convince me that from then on it would be useless to search for fresh tracks of Soli. Their mating season was approaching. At that time of the year, they always moved to other parts of the jungle, far, far away. And, anyhow, important as it was that the little female Soli should be covered by a young male Soli, wasn't it much more urgent (asked the notable, with some logic) that all the hunters who had worked so hard to buy new wives should sleep well and in leisure with them, instead of wasting their time and energies over this incessant marching through the jungle? Wasn't it time that these new wives, who were getting very impatient, should be made heavy with children?

All this was just talk, I knew, judging by what I had noticed in my regular visits to the big camp of the hunters, which had grown larger and larger near our clearing. Recently, lots of waists had grown, too, in that camp; young waists and older ones—more than enough of them to show that the men had done their duty in this way, too, as well as working with me in the jungle.

But this was another symptom of the same spreading unrest, and I felt strongly that the time had come when I had to take some drastic step. If I didn't want to lose what grip I had, so painstakingly, gained on the Mayaka, I had better come out into the open, and take the chance of broaching the subject of the Mulahu, frankly. This I must do without further delay, before it turned out to be too late.

The problem, a delicate one, was whom to tackle first. Kommanda, in a way, seemed the best bet. He had become my most reliable man. He had accompanied me in almost every march and hunt, keeping always behind me, always alert, attentive, prompt in helping me; always ready to pass me my spare rifle, or my little leather-covered brandy flask, which he had fastened to his belt, or the bandolier-like canvas bag containing my plaster of Paris field kit,—with which I often took impressions of rare animals' footprints (always hoping for a certain huge, human-like one, of course).

Most important of all, whenever we had struck the inviolable borders of the Mulahu's territory, Kommanda had shown himself the best man. He had been frightened, too; he had stopped like the others, and his eyes had avoided mine. Yet, never once had he grumbled those words I hated: "Certain, horrible death."

On each occasion, something indefinable in his attitude had given me the impression that his terror was not as abject and paralysing as that of the Mayaka and the Pygmies.

On the other hand, there was the obstacle of race; Kommanda was a Bambuba, a friend of theirs, but not one of them. Perhaps, too, that was why he had reacted a little differently from them. I might, I supposed, manage to persuade him to break with me into the Mulahu's territory. As a guide, he was as instinctively good, as unfailingly reliable as any other; with him, I would not get lost. But that was all. To venture into that prohibited zone, for who knew how long, I would need many more men. Where would he get them? He had no authority over the Mayaka, nor over the Pygmies. In fact, they would probably resent his intrusion. If I approached him, there was a danger that the situation, far from improving, might get worse—perhaps get entirely out of hand.

And then, what?

AMISI'S PROMISE

MY ONLY alternative was Amisi. Instinct, reason, experience, told me that he was the right man.

In those six months he had demonstrated all the good qualities once attributed to him by Dr. Morais, and more. His years of blameless service in the army and his exceptional marksmanship had gained him further recognition than that of being made Headman, or secondary chief. He had been given, and had been allowed to keep, an old-fashioned gun. That was the proudest possession and the proudest privilege which a native could dream of, then, and one that no other Mayaka had ever obtained.

As a result of many thrilling experiences, first while tracking and hunting with his officers, later, when with his subjects and, finally, with me, Amisi had acquired a self-reliance unique in a native. For he had learned that not even the mightiest of creatures can stand up against a well-aimed, properly fired gun. I had seen him face charging "jungle cows" (the little red buffalo of the jungle, which are twice as vicious and treacherous as the black buffalo of the plains), maddened elephants and wounded leopards—and never tremble or hesitate a second. If I could not manage to induce him to help me find the Mulahu—well, there would be no further hope left to me.

I approached him on the subject, at what I thought the most propitious moment.

It was a Sunday afternoon. To raise everybody's morale, I had organized a big dance in the hunters' camp. Their clearing and ours were still echoing with the songs and shouts of the villagers, as they returned to their huts, on legs made slightly unsteady by repeated

libations drunk with the native beer I had supplied in exceptionally generous quantity for the occasion.

Amisi remained behind to thank me on behalf of all his people. He, too, was in a particularly mellow, expansive mood. The minute I saw we were absolutely alone, I launched into the conversation I had so many times rehearsed in my mind.

Psychologically good though my choice of time was, when the word Mulahu left my lips, I thought Amisi would turn and run from me. With visible effort, he stayed.

"The Mulahu?" he said after a while. He shook his head violently. "I do not know it, Bwana. I do not know it."

I put my hands before my eyes, palms against my forehead, fingers downward, and looked through them. It was an awkward but unmistakable imitation of the white curtain which falls before the Mulahu's face. "Show me the hairs your father left you," I said.

Amisi, the fearless, the almost-civilized, the disbeliever in superstition, trembled from head to foot. "No," he protested. "No, no, Bwana, no." It was almost as if I had asked him to grab a red hot iron with his bare hands.

"No, Bwana," he insisted, darting his eyes about like a trapped beast. "No, no!"

"Shut up!" I shouted with all the power of my lungs.

In certain emotional circumstances, I've come to learn, a sudden loud yell obtains the most startling effects upon a deeply upset native; it is something like slapping the face of a woman who is hysterical. If he is a coward, he will respond by uttering a cry of anguish, and run. If he is, essentially, a brave man, he will be startled out of his confusion, become ashamed of his momentary weakness and take a grip on himself.

So it was with Amisi. He, whom I had always treated with the utmost kindness and gentleness, was very startled. The savage in him shot a wild light into his eyes. Then his military training automatically jerked his limbs into the stiffness of attention; and his inborn sense of dignity and responsibility, briskly reawakened, cleared his brain from the fumes of beer, from the clutches of fear.

"Yes, Bwana," he said soberly, humbly. "I go."

A few moments later he was back. He looked right and left to

make sure nobody was watching us, but in his none-too-firm hand was an old pouch of antelope hide. He opened it and, one by one extracted three* long hairs, which he silently handed to me, with as much care if they had been sticks of high explosive ready to go off.

The moment I saw them, I knew that those hairs, which years ago Amisi's father had plucked out of the dead Australian's mouth and nails, could belong only to the Mulahu or to some other equally unknown, similarly gigantic creature.

In texture they matched those of the gorilla. In colour they were similar to the white hairs of the colobus monkey. In stiffness they resembled the moustaches of a leopard. But they were many times longer, larger, coarser, stronger than any of these, or of the hair of any other wild animal I had ever seen in my African life.

A thrill shot through me. I had heard a lot about these hairs; but now, there they were, between my own fingers, the first tangible evidence that a strange, huge creature called Mulahu actually existed. Now, I thought, I must press my advantage. I must persuade Amisi to help me, break down his last fears and communicate to him my enthusiasm.

I am sure I was never so eloquent. I appealed to his pride and bravery and soldierly training. I promised him that, at the right moment, I would go first, protect him and his men with my rifle, with my life if necessary. I told him that I would make him wealthy, that I was sure the Administrator would promote him chief, and that maybe the King of the Belgians himself would send him a medal such as few other great chiefs had ever received.

I overplayed my hand, I expect; or Amisi was a much nobler man than anyone could expect to find inside a semi-savage's loin-cloth. In any case, his was a gentleman's answer—so impressively dignified, so princely in its simplicity, that it almost made me feel cheap for having harped so much on the material advantages he would reap.

* I have never managed to learn for sure whether, as Dr. Morais had said, there had originally been two or three more, nor—if so—what Amisi or his father had done with them. The most likely among them any stories I heard, was that Amisi's father had given them, in payment for the magic medicine against the Mulahu, to Siku, the sorcerer I will introduce in a few pages.

He politely thanked me. He said he would do his best, but without regard for gain—simply because I was a good hunter and a good Bwana, who had done much for him and for his people.

"I promise you," he concluded with all the dignity of a *grand seigneur*. "And if I die in the attempt to keep my promise, it will not matter. My jungle will never come to an end. My race will still continue. My village will still live. My many sons will still be there, and one of them will take my place."

I was quite moved. I shook hands with him—four times, as the Mayaka do on solemn occasions. Then, I asked him if he saw any hope of getting some hunters to help us.

"Bwana," answered Amisi, "I will go on the Mulahu's trail, whenever you order me. And I will die the moment my eyes meet his. But no other man will go, ever; unless Siku, the sorcerer, can be convinced to give us his *dawa*, the secret medicine that no one else knows about."

It was the same *dawa*, Amisi explained, that Siku had given twelve years or so before to Amisi's father, to some of the latter's hunters, and to one or two of his Bambuba friends, when they had come to the momentous decision of penetrating the Mulahu's forbidden territory, to search for the vanished Bwana Nyekundu. The *dawa*, which alone had protected them, allowed them to return safely with the corpse, even though, during the perilous journey, they had twice had a glimpse of a Mulahu. Only that *dawa*, and other charms from Siku, had kept the Mulahu from looking at them at those moments—or they, too, would have died.

This was the Mayaka's absolute, unshakable belief . . . a belief that Amisi, despite his professed disregard for minor superstitions, thoroughly shared. Furthermore, he said, his men were too devoted to him and to myself not to stop us, with violence if necessary, from taking the Mulahu's trail, unless the *dawa* had first been administered to us. For without it, we would certainly die, both of us, which would have dire consequences for the whole tribe.

"Well," I said, "send a messenger for him, at once, then." The progress I had made had been so unexpectedly rapid that I felt exultant. "I will talk to Siku as soon as he comes. I will give him all he wants, as long as he gives the *dawa* to us and to all the hunters

who accept it. Go on! Send someone immediately. Does he live far?"

Amisi sombrely shook his head. "No, Bwana," he cold-showered my enthusiasm. "Siku's hut is near here, in one of my villages. Sometimes he lives there, sometimes he goes far, far away, all alone, into the prohibited territory. For it is there that he gathers the Mulahu's excrement, hairs which the animal has shed and other ingredients that no one knows about, with which he makes his *dawa*. But never has he consented to part with any of it—never once, since that time he gave some to my father and his friends."

"But where is he, now?" I said, trying to keep the impatience from my voice. "Aren't you the Headman? Can't you order him to come promptly, to do what you say?"

"Yes," Amisi said. "I can find out where he is, I can order him, but Siku will come or go as he pleases. For he is a cunning old man, who has other medicines that could kill all of us. He, who doesn't fear the Mulahu, fears nobody. He, who expected to be made Headman at my father's death, will not listen to me. For he hates me, is my sworn enemy."

The moment was so tense for both of us, the atmosphere so charged with drama, that a light rustling on my left startled us like the sudden report of a gun.

We turned our heads, saw a shadow moving behind a huge trunk and rushed towards it. Damnation! Someone had been hidden there, not twenty yards from us, listening to our conversation; which was just what both of us had so carefully tried to avoid.

In my hurry, my foot caught in a protruding root. As I fell and sprawled face downward, I succeeded in shouting, "Go on." But Amisi saw my forehead hit the hard ground, and some blood appear on it. He stopped short and ran back to help me.

"After him!" I ordered. And I got up as quickly as I could.

We pushed ahead, following the crackling sounds made by a pair of bare feet now in open flight. But those few seconds we had lost were enough to give the fugitive sufficient advantage, in that dense mass of vegetation which surrounded the clearing. Amisi, more experienced than I, understood it and halted. Instead of continuing the pursuit, he tried to find a footprint that might reveal

the identity of the man who had spied on us. But it hadn't rained for a while, and what little ground one could see was as hard and as smooth as stone.

"Gone," Amisi said.

The man had got safely away, it was true, but there still remained something of the smell he had left behind in the cavity of the giant tree-trunk where he had hidden so long, probably sweating with the fear of being caught. It was a stench worse than that which any native would normally emanate. It was one which reminded me of something, but, try as I could, I wasn't able, for the moment, to place it. Yet, it was important that I should. For no native would dare such an impertinence, would take such a risk, except for an extremely serious reason—a reason which might make the whole difference between the success or failure of my plans.

"NO ONE SHALL DIE WHO HAS RECEIVED
THE TRUE DAWA"

IT CAME back to me only three weeks later—Kommanda! It was the way he had smelled the day I first saw him in New Beni, when he had come to bring the Administrator the message from the boy Charles, who had left his job so hastily!

It came back to me only because my outraged house-boy came to report that Kommanda had run away during the night. Apparently, he had taken with him not only his few belongings, but also the uniforms and blankets I had given him—even my brandy flask and the plaster of Paris outfit which he usually carried for me on safari. Most serious thing of all, a careful search revealed that my always-loaded spare rifle had disappeared, too. The theft of this would have been a serious offence in any African colony; it was worse in the Belgian Congo where even whites had then to fight through miles of red tape before being allowed to have firearms in their possession.

My wife and I, our other boys, and Amisi, were equally non-plussed. It seemed incredible that it should be Kommanda—the boy we had trusted so completely, who had always seemed to be the most honest, solicitous, devoted of them all!

Of course, my duty was to report him—and the missing rifle—at once, either to the Administrator of New Beni, or to the one in Irumu. But I didn't know myself under whose jurisdiction we and our base camp were. For Amisi's superior was Chief Apaligbo, who descended from Irumu; and Chief Kalume's territory, administered by the New Beni officials, extended northward up to some traditional borderline which no map, of course, had yet determined exactly. So, I let it pass for that day.

On the morrow, the agitation among our boys, and in Amisi's main village, increased even more and kept me busy. For two women were reported missing. One of them, Mayomba, was the curvaceous, preferred wife of one of Amisi's subjects, a nervous shy little man named Boro, who regularly supplied us with long-legged chickens and (frequently rotten) eggs.

The other woman we didn't know. Amisi told us that her name was Amendobo, and that she had recently been living away from her husband—in Siku's village, and in Siku's hut. Amisi let us understand that the old sorcerer doted on this girl of solid, provocative charms; and that it was probably due to her presence and spell-binding influence that Siku had not even deigned to answer a summons which I had, by now, issued more than once.

The old man's attitude of passive resistance was already driving me mad. During the three weeks since our talk, Amisi had worked feverishly. He had persuaded more and more hunters to follow us on the Mulahu's trail. Even some of our personal boys had come to accept my plans with fatalistic resignation, and had stopped mumbling every few hours about imaginary relatives who were dying in far villages where their presence was urgently required. But, to all of them, from Amisi downward, everything we were doing depended upon the indispensable condition that we should first of all be immunized by the famous *dawa*.

I wanted to go myself to Siku's village. But the disappearance of Kommanda, and then of Mayomba and Amendobo, kept the whole place in turmoil and kept me occupied every minute. There was a continuous coming and going of natives; rescue parties started off in search of the two women; other parties returned, empty-handed and discouraged. At least for the time being, my plans all seemed to have stalled.

If this woman Amendobo had such a hold on the old sorcerer, her disappearance would be sure to make him even more difficult and unreachable. Meanwhile, the effects of my proselytizing would cool off. Some native or other was bound to hit upon the idea that the vanishing of my boy and of the two women represented a warning of the spirits, a grave omen or something else of the kind. The talk would spread. Half-hearted hunters would see in it good

justification for pulling out; others would imitate them. Then, ashamed of having broken their word, they would keep away from *our* clearing. Human nature being more or less the same everywhere, the few remaining stout ones would be sure, then, to count their own numbers; and would find themselves a small minority. They would weaken, disappear—and leave me with only Amisi. And Amisi himself, had too strong a belief in this cursed, unobtainable *dawa* for me to let him come with me before he got it—even if he stuck by his word.

Just when I had good reason to be convinced that I was finally approaching success, my work of so many years, the hardships of all those months in the Mayaka jungle, my feats of patience, diplomacy and oratory in the last few weeks—all seemed once more doomed to crumble to nothing.

Furthermore, my beastly malaria was beginning to act up again, in the same way it had done three years before; and nerves, exhaustion and disappointment naturally didn't help. I tried all I could to hide my condition and my fears from Ellen, in order not to worry her too much. But I could not help thinking of what Dr. Morais had written to me at the Cairo hospital about a second attack of black-water. I made an effort to sleep for longer hours, to eat more regularly, to follow more precisely all the prescriptions and recommendations of my two doctor friends. Above all, I made a strong attempt not to fret the whole time.

One Monday morning, having felt better for a few days, I went out alone to shoot a gazelle for the pot, as the larder, in the recent general confusion, had got quite low. Following the well-beaten paths in the vicinity of the clearing, I got the gazelle. And I was coming back to send off a boy to fetch it and take it to the cook, when a terrific bellowing arose from the direction of Amisi's village.

The yelling approached, and a few minutes later Amisi stepped into the clearing, his inseparable gun in hand, Boro on his left, an elderly man on his right. A stream of shouting villagers followed. My attention focused on the leading trio. As they advanced toward me, I noticed that Boro had shed much of the worry and sorrow which seemed to have crushed him since the disappearance of his preferred wife. Amisi's face showed nothing but sheer astonishment.

The elderly man, whom I had never seen before, I recognized as surely as the old overcoat he was wearing—a dilapidated garment of mine which I had discarded months before, and which had probably found its way to him via one of the villagers.

It was Siku, the elusive sorcerer himself.

As he came nearer, I saw his eyes—pale and inscrutable. When he stopped before me, a silence smothered the yelling of the crowd.

"Yambo, Bwana," he saluted, as if he had dropped in, by chance, after a few hours' absence.

"Yambo, Siku. Welcome to Tzamboho."

Any other native would have been surprised at my knowing his name, would probably have laughed, thinking it a great joke. Not this one.

"I have come to give you the *dawa*," he announced in an almost arrogant tone. "I shall give it to you, to all your wives and servants. Also to my Headman Amisi, to his hunters and wives and children."

I was as much overcome as the stunned villagers; it seemed too good to be true. Now everything, apparently, was going to be all right. Not, of course, that I had any faith in the wretched *dawa*, or any desire to eat the mess; after learning about the "excrements, lost hairs" and other similarly delicate ingredients, from Amisi, I certainly had no appetite for it. But to the Mayaka it meant everything—to them, it was a question of life or death; and now they were going to get it!

When the deafening applause of the villagers had subsided, I thanked Siku. "*Iko muzuli*," I started telling him. "This is good. I shall give you many good gifts . . ."

"One goat," he interrupted, matter-of-factly. "You shall pay me one goat for each person." Then, with a contemptuous glance at the little man on the other side of Amisi: "And to Boro, a fowl for each person, for he is my assistant."

Considered from the point of view of the standards and etiquette of those times, the price was outrageous and the manner of asking it extremely insolent.

I saw the eyes of Amisi flash with indignation, and the scrawny chest of Boro expand with importance. That squirt of a little man irritated me even more than his master. Nothing would have given

me more satisfaction than to let him have a very special kick in the pants—in the loincloth, that is. Unfortunately, this was out of the question. The “assistant”, indeed! But why had his affiliation to the old sorcerer never been mentioned to me before? And why was this secret relationship now publicly revealed? Perhaps because it had ceased to be useful? Had I been wrong, then, in thinking that it was Kommanda who had spied upon me and Amisi? It could have been Boro, instead. Who could say how strongly he would smell, when afraid? But if Kommanda had not listened to my conversation with Amisi, if he had not been scared away by what we had said about the Mulahu, why, why had he run off?

All these questions, and many more, flashed through my mind as, with a show of sarcastic astonishment, I asked Siku if the price he demanded was not slightly exorbitant.

“Is not a man’s life worth a goat and a chicken?” he replied. “Does not a man pay ten, fifteen goats to buy a wife? Would not any hunter pay as many goats and fowls as he has fingers on his hands, to save the life of his child?”

The tone was even more impertinent than the words, but I thought I understood why the old man was acting in that way. There was nothing to be gained from insulting me, and he did not care that much for goats. Even less, could he be interested in making Boro rich. All he wanted to do was to get out of administering his *dawa*, and he hoped that the exorbitance of his request, plus the incivility of his remarks, would put me off. Why, then, had he come, just when I had given up sending out messengers for him?

“And who guarantees,” I said, “that your *dawa* will save these men and women and children from the death the Mulahu bestows upon those he sees? Who guarantees that I, myself, will not die?”

The villagers were visibly startled—as much by my open mention of the Mulahu, as by my challenge to the sorcerer they all feared. But the palaver had lasted enough; it was time to bring it to a close.

“Basil!” I exclaimed above the spreading murmurs. “You, Siku, will give the *dawa* to all those I choose. For each of them, you will receive a goat and a hen. But not now. Only when I, myself, have killed, or at least seen, the Mulahu. And get this well into your head, Siku. If any one of the Mayaka dies, you, Siku, will die, too, at the

hands of the white men of government. If not, one of my own rifles will kill you, understand?—just as surely as this one is going to kill that monkey. Look!” And I pointed at a monkey which was peeping through the highest foliage of an enormous tree.

I lifted my rifle. I took quick aim. I fired. More by luck than by actual marksmanship, the almost impossible shot succeeded. The big monkey, one of the usual ravagers of our garden, dropped like a stone.

Before Siku could recover from the effects of the loud detonation, and of the lightning-magic of the white man: “Remember,” I said, “like that, my rifle will kill you, too.”

Cheap dramatics? Today and here, in one of the world’s most modern, tranquil little cities, it certainly sounds silly. At that time and place, in that isolated jungle clearing, it seemed to work.

“The *dawa* is ready, Bwana,” said Siku with astonishing meekness. “And the spirits of my ancestors will witness that no one shall die in the hunt who has received the true *dawa*.”

"MAY PEACE REMAIN WITH THE
MAN WHO LIVES"

As SIKU briefly explained before starting his work, the ceremony of the *dava* was far from being the simple formality I had imagined; it was more than the mere eating or drinking of some messy concoction. Actually it was so complicated that, when evening came, only Amisi, eight of his hunters, three of his pygmies, and my wife and myself, had been treated. Yet Siku, assisted by Boro, had worked fast, without interruption, and with a concentration equalled only by that of the rest of the villagers, who watched in silent awe from tight, tense groups all around us.

Prepared as I was to go as far as was considered necessary I didn't want to risk some nasty infection, too, by being cut with instruments which had just "operated" on some African afflicted by a contagious disease. So, the moment Siku produced his ceremonial knives, which looked fairly clean, I decided to be the first. This choice also gave Ellen the opportunity of taking some pictures while the light was still good.*

Siku agreed with a nod. Following his instructions, I sat on a stump and opened my shirt. With mixed feelings, I saw one of his knives flash. I felt the prick of the sharp point—twice on each side of my chest, twice on my right arm, twice on my left arm. Blood dripped out of each of the eight cuts.

How idiotic I had been to worry about aseptic knives, soon became evident. As I should have expected, there wasn't anything

* Unfortunately these negatives proved to be badly under-exposed. Instead of them, I am showing here pictures of my wife undergoing the same "treatment" as, despite the late hour, they came out somewhat better.

sanitary about the whole performance. The next thing Siku did was to take from Boro's dirty palm a pinch of something which looked like very black ash. With unwashed fingers, he began to rub this powder into every wound, until the bleeding stopped. Incidentally, Siku was very deft and didn't hurt any of us, even though the cuts were so deep that Ellen and I still have their marks, which look like little blue tattoos, each about a quarter of an inch long.

The meaning of the invocations with which the sepulchral voice of Siku accompanied this part of the proceedings, was not very clear. Nor did they help us to guess the composition of the powder. All I could grasp were the words: "Mulahu", "fire", "beware", repeated over and over again, mixed with others I had never before heard.

The treatment which followed was easier to understand. It consisted of his pouring into the eyes, the nostrils and the mouth several drops of a greenish liquid from a leaf which had been twisted into the shape of a funnel. I failed to comprehend how a plant, supposed to be harmful to a tough brute like the Mulahu, could be beneficial to me. But Siku, at the same time, mumbled a warning to the Mulahu, not to throw his murderous hair into my nose, mouth and eyes, because they were now protected by this infusion of herbs and roots which were poisonous to him.

For the same purpose, and with a similar invocation, a brownish powder, made from grinding some equally Mulahu-scaring ingredients, was carefully spread under the nails of each of my fingers and toes.

Next came a yellowish-green powder. Solemnly, Siku announced that it was made from the dried excrement of the Mulahu, and he asked me to rub it well into my forehead and hair, my arms, legs and chest. For then, he said, when I was in the proximity of the Mulahu, the animal would not discover my scent, but only recognize a familiar smell and let me approach unharmed—which, to judge by the stink which the powder gave off, and not taking into consideration the energetic shower I intended to take as soon as possible, seemed quite likely.

Finally, Siku gave me a little whistle, made out of some wood and a small root. The whistle, he explained, should be played continu-

ously while I was getting close to the Mulahu; the idea being, I gathered, that the monotonous shrill sound would both cover any noise I might make, and induce in the animal a defenceless torpor—a sort of hypnotic sleep, as we would say.

As for the root, which had to be fastened to my hair, its purpose was purely symbolical. It belonged to the *figus* plant, one of the most astonishing parasites of the jungle, and the worst among vegetable killers. Seeds from it, which have been blown by the wind on to the branch of a colossal tree, will at once develop with prodigious speed into long creepers reaching towards the ground. Each of these creepers penetrates into the soil, grows upwards again, from there, with terrific vitality, and gradually encompasses the trunk of the host-tree with an ever thickening net of smaller creepers. Soon these creepers cover the entire trunk, sucking the life out of the tree, at the same time strangling and swallowing it bit by bit—until the fig plant finally emerges, victoriously enormous from the very place where the devoured, obliterated giant tree had stood, maybe for centuries.

All this, Siku didn't have to explain to me; as soon as I recognized the little root, I understood its purpose. Siku's final remark confirmed this.

"Just as this root", he said, "can grow to encompass and conquer the jungle's greatest tree, so he who receives the true *dawa* shall be made capable of conquering the Mulahu, the mightiest of the jungle's creatures."

After this, with a sort of "next patient" bow, he nodded to my wife. Gamely, she came forward. Somewhat doubtfully, I gave her my place on the stump and, after a moment of hesitation, Siku reached for his knife. Again its blade flashed, precisely, skilfully administering the eight ritual wounds.

★ ★ ★

That evening, after having "vaccinated" his "assistant", Boro, (the day's fourteenth patient), Siku silently showed me his assortment of containers. Gazelle horns, big rolled-up leaves, pieces of bark, were all empty. His *dawa* was exhausted. The conclusion was obvious; he would have to return to his village to make some

more, or perhaps journey into the jungle to gather the secret ingredients.

I had a hunch that, once gone, he would never come back again, but there wasn't much I could do about it. Without medicines, he was no use, nor was there any advantage to be gained from trying to keep him in my camp against his will. So, I gave him a few presents, and confirmed my promise that he would get fourteen goats for himself and fourteen hens for Boro—in due time, of course, and if all went well.

Taking the gifts without so much as a smile of pleasure, "Bwana," he said, "again I repeat and swear to you, that no one who has received the true *dawa* shall die for seeing the Mulahu."

"And," I answered, "again I repeat and swear to you, that, if one of my hunters dies, my rifle will bark—and kill you, just as quickly as it destroyed a monkey this morning."

Whether he believed me or not, I cannot say. He just stared at me silently for a moment. He opened his mouth as if to say something. Then he closed it again. Abruptly, he turned around and, without a salutation, he cut through the now silent crowd of watchers and went off into the darkness.

Boro's eyes, narrowed by some violent feeling I could not decipher, followed the vanishing form of the surly sorcerer. Then he, too, silently marched away—in the opposite direction, towards Amisi's village.

As for Amisi, he was no longer grinning, as he had been since Siku's abrupt offer to "vaccinate" us. Now he slowly shook his head. His face was a study; he looked deeply bewildered, and his lips moved soundlessly. It seemed to me that he was repeating to himself Siku's parting words and mine, as if in a hopeless effort to grasp some secret meaning hidden beneath them.

"Come on!" I barked, to snap him out of it. "Come inside the house to make our plans. For tomorrow we go on the Malahu's trail."

Poor Amisi! My voice startled him; yet, obediently, he followed me inside. Once in what I called my office, I began to outline my long-studied plan. He appeared to be listening, and every now and then nodded in assent. But he was only half there; it felt as if I

were talking to a blank wall. Certainly he wasn't his normal bright, alert self.

I tried some trite, usually successful, jokes, but they fell flat. In my elation, I felt irritated by so much unwarranted gloom.

"What's the matter with you?" I asked him impatiently.

"Nothing, Bwana," he answered. "Nothing. I am listening."

Only in the light of later events, was I able to, at least, guess why that night Amisi had been so worried and grave and aloof. Some sort of sixth sense which didn't have any voice in me, might have been warning the primitive nature in him of the serious events which were to follow. Maybe, that night, an inner voice gave him a premonition of the queer twists which fate was soon to play with Siku's ambiguous oath and my own jesting one. For neither of them was to be strictly kept. Yet both (*yes, both oaths*) were to be tragically fulfilled.

Naturally, I cannot say for sure that this was so but, thinking back, I have a strong feeling that while I was joking with him and being impatient with him, Amisi sensed that our talk was the very last one we were ever to have.

The fact is that, when I finished giving him my instructions for the next day, he didn't use the habitual salutation, which literally translated means "May peace remain with both of us."

Though at the moment I didn't pay any attention to it, later I remembered that, for going out, he had used a slightly different word, instead—one which has quite another significance. It means: "May peace remain with the man who lives."

TOWARDS "THE MOUNTAIN OF FEAR"

THAT night I only slept a few minutes. I went to bed for some hours, but I couldn't keep my eyes closed. How could I sleep when the last obstacle separating me from my quest had finally been swept aside?

Forgotten were Kommanda's thefts and disappearance, the vanishing of the two women, the report I still owed the Administrator. Forgotten were the disappointments of the past, the fatigue of the day, the recently alarming bouts with malaria, the sharp sting that a hot bath had left in each of the small wounds carved in my skin by Siku's knife.

"Tomorrow," pulsed my brain. "Tomorrow. . . ."

Years of hardships, of waiting, of dreaming, were to bear fruit at long last. And there were so few hours left!

"Tomorrow, tomorrow. . . ."

Siku's arrival had been so sudden, the day so filled, the decision so quick, that there were countless preparations to be made, small items to be remembered and packed, instructions to be left with Ellen. Not strong enough to come with me, she had reluctantly agreed to stay behind, but wanted to help in everything she could.

My mind feverishly reviewed all the plans I had made since the day Amisi had first talked about the sorcerer and his *dawa*. I checked, one by one, the radical modifications I had had to think up that afternoon, when Siku, apart from my wife and myself, had "treated" only Amisi, three of his pygmies, seven of his hunters, and that little runt of a Boro.

Originally, I had counted on the fact that, when the hour struck, I would have enough men who were "vaccinated" and willing, to move off toward the Mulahu's secret territory with my forces

divided into six groups. My plan had been that each group, including the barely sufficient number of porters, should start from a different point, chosen from among the most strategic of the many where the Mayaka had halted me in the past (and which I had every time marked in my logbook on a rough map of my own).

My idea was that each group should converge, from the point assigned to it, toward a certain elevated piece of land which no native would admit to have seen, but which all Mayaka agreed stood approximately in the centre of the Mulahu's kingdom. This was what Mayaka and pygmies called "The Mountain of Fear", though, as I had said to the incredulous A.T. of New Beni, they didn't like to speak about it any more than they liked to speak about the Mulahu.

But now, since Siku had immunized only very few men, I had to alter my programme. The best I could do was to reduce the groups to three. One, consisting of three hunters and two pygmies, would be led by Amisi from the farthest western point. Another, composed of four Mayaka and guided by the remaining inoculated pygmy, would start from the east. Not far from the latter, and trying to keep within earshot of it, I would begin to explore the territory in between, with Boro as my only companion.

As for porters, I had to use men who had not received the *dawa*, which was a very serious obstacle. The most I could hope for was that they would follow me up to the invisible border; and I prayed God that, once left there, they would wait for me. This meant, too, that, instead of being able to advance at once deep into the prohibited country, I would, for the first days at least, have to return to the porters every night for shelter and food.

After some reconnoitring, however, and as soon as the hunters had grown a bit accustomed to roaming through the taboo country, I planned to gather all the inoculated men, to take with us only the real essentials, and to go ahead all together, straight towards "The Hills of Fear". For it was only in their vicinity that I really expected to find the Mulahu.

I will not easily forget the chilly dawn which ended that sleepless night of planning and preparation. Nor shall I forget Ellen's still sleepy, deeply troubled eyes, the frightened expressions of our boys

and the ghostly faces of the Mayaka who were to stay behind, as Boro approached me.

Boro had a cocky air, that morning. Belligerently, he told me that both Amisi's and the other group were already on their way; that the porters were loaded; that he, himself, was ready—ready, he repeated, beating his scrawny chest, to guide me to the Hills of Fear; and ready, too, he added, with a sideways glance at his three remaining wives, to earn the great riches that I had promised.

The little squirt! Circumstances had forced me to put myself practically at his mercy. The success of this trip depended a great deal upon his loyalty and good will, and his words seemed to show the proper spirit, the best of intentions and a capability for bravery which, frankly, I had never thought was in him. Yet, I had to admit, with some shame, that I felt nothing but a single temptation—letting him have that kick in his loincloth which I had barely resisted administering to him the previous morning.

Instead, waving a last good-bye to my wife, I motioned to Boro to go ahead. The porters grunted as they lifted the loads to their heads. And we were on our way.

In the beginning everything went beautifully; too beautifully, in fact. Had I been in a normal state of mind, that excessive smoothness would certainly have aroused some sense of suspicion in me. But I was too excited, and too busy, trying both to keep up with Boro's fast and steady pace, and concentrating on moving my feet as silently as the porters, who followed me in a group which increasing fear made more compact the farther we went.

At about noon, Boro found a glade, over which a small opening in the higher foliage permitted us to see a scrap of hazy sky. We waited until, through the mist, the sun appeared exactly above us as a small red ball. Then, as prearranged, he let out a call. It was a blood-curdling scream, a perfect imitation of the yell of a startled chimpanzee. Soon, a similar cry came from the east and, after a while, another, barely audible one, reached us from the west. The group guided by a pygmy, and the other one led by Amisi, had both reached their planned positions.

The next step forward was the most telling of the day; it would show me whether Boro could be entirely trusted or not. As I re-

sumed the march, I recalled in every detail the day some months before, when I had come in the same direction, searching for the tracks of the antelope Soli. Approximately two hours after we had left that little glade, all the Mayaka with me had halted abruptly. "Stop, Bwana," the one ahead of me had said. "Stop we must!" Irritated, I had asked the usual question, and obtained the usual sullen, frightened answer. Once more, I heard that death—certain, horrible death—was there, just ahead of us.

That occasion, however, had been specially recorded in my diary, because, on the inspiration of the moment, I had tried a little experiment—not that I had had any precise idea of how I could make use of its results. While the hunters stared in stony silence at their feet, I had turned my shoulders towards a huge cottonwood tree, slipped my knife out of its sheath, reached behind my back and scratched a hasty cross in the bark of the trunk.

Nobody appeared to have noticed either my manoeuvre or the cross. Immediately afterwards, we had started back towards the camp. Since then, I had never been in that direction again, and certainly no Mayaka would have risked going that far on his own initiative.

Now, I thought, that cross was going to come in handy. For, remembering who the man was who had once guided me to that spot, I had summoned him and Boro to see me the night before, as soon as I had dismissed Amisi. The Mayaka hunter had no difficulty in remembering the place, nor did he have too much trouble in explaining to Boro how to get me there. He had talked a long time, but by the time he had finished Boro assured him, and me, that he would be able to find the place easily; a feat which, much as I respected the native's remarkable sense of direction, appeared to me impossible, but which, if accomplished, would give me proof that Boro was not trying to fool me.

I was looking forward to the conclusion of the experiment because it would also establish to my satisfaction the fact that the border of the forbidden territory, invisible as it had always appeared to me, was something much more definite to the Mayaka. For, if Boro could bring me straight back to that cross—and stop there—it would mean that the border was not, as I had believed in the

beginning, a rough improvisation which was made by scared minds and which was produced whenever convenient, as an excuse not to proceed any further in a certain direction. Instead, it would be shown to be something traditionally established, actually existing. Unexplainable as it would remain, it would then appear to be something as perceptible to a Mayaka's senses as a brick wall between two properties would be perceptible to mine.

Now, as I saw Boro halt before me, and as I heard behind me the thudding of loads quickly dropped, I looked at my watch. It was exactly 1:37. It was too early; Boro, in fact, had fooled me.

Now, nobody moved or said a word. For once, there was no mention of "certain, horrible death". I didn't say anything either. There was a cottonwood tree, just beside me, but it wasn't the one I remembered for its trunk was covered with thick moss. Boro was going to get that long-overdue kick, after all.

"MULAHU!"

FIRST, however, I reached for the thick coat of moss. I got hold of some of it, at about the height of my cartridge belt, with both hands, and pulled. I blinked my eyes. Talk about being knocked down with a feather! There, sure enough, was the cross, still perfectly discernible, which my knife had carved in the bark months before.

I felt like a dog; I had misjudged Boro. Africans angered me at times, but seldom, if ever, did they get on my nerves. Yet, I had let myself be carried away by the antipathy I felt for this little squirt, with his monkey-like appearance and grimaces, his air of cockiness and silly importance. Faced with this proof of his loyalty and ability, I reacted exaggeratedly in the opposite direction. Suddenly, I felt I ought to have full confidence in him. I complimented him, slapped him on the back and gave him some of my cigarettes.

He immediately began to strut about like a bantam cock, ordered the porters around while they pitched my tent, gathered wood, started a fire, got water and so on. Then, he tried to boss me, too.

The moment things were in some sort of shape, and my instruments, lenses, films, movie and still cameras were all safely stored in my pup tent, I wanted to push ahead with him.

But: "No," Boro said importantly. "First we should eat."

As far as I was concerned, food could wait. As for him, I told him he could take a couple of bananas and munch them while we were moving. Violently he shook his head, and the feathers crowning his little straw hat were absurdly whisked about. Darting worried glances right and left, smelling the air and making all sorts of drama-

tic gestures with his hands, he tried to convince me that we must wait till the next day.

"The Hurricane, Bwana," he hissed. "The Hurricane will come soon!"

It was true. During the last ten minutes or so, the dimness had become almost darkness, the dampness had got to be intolerable, the temperature continued to rise, and not a bird moved, nor an insect, nor a leaf. The heavy silence was broken only by the porters who were chopping sticks and huge magongo leaves with which to build themselves a shelter between two immense trunks. The suffocating tension which usually precedes an explosion of the elements was smothering the whole jungle around us.

Now, a hurricane in the evergreen equatorial jungle is something of almost indescribable violence and fearfulness. It snaps the greatest of trees and sends them crashing down through the thick undergrowth. It fills with terror the mightiest beasts as well as the tiniest, and pushes them into panicky stampedes or into a frantic search for safe cover. But, how many of those awe-inspiring convulsions of nature had I had to put up with in my African life? Scores even hundreds of them. And I hadn't minded them a bit; in fact, to me they were nothing but a tremendously magnificent, exhilarating symphony, which I always enjoyed with every fibre of my being—as I enjoyed the pleasure of being soaked from head to foot with rain, which later the heat would dry from my few clothes in a matter of minutes.

So why should I wait—maybe for hours—when the Mulahu's territory was there, just before me, and no longer taboo for my impatient feet?

The porters, huddled around the fire under their little roof, shook as if shivering—in that heat. But they nodded, promising not to run off before we came back that evening. Boro stuttered, protested, begged me to keep my voice low, in order not to attract the attention of the Mulahu, whom the approaching storm was surely driving, from wherever it was, toward its caves.

He looked very funny and, despite the poor light, I took some snapshots of him, but my patience was at its end. So I shut the case of the small camera which was fastened to my chest, hung my

spare plaster of Paris outfit round Boro's neck, gave him a sharp order and looked down at him, my eyes so hard, for once, that he understood that I would put up with no more stalling.

Resignedly, Boro sighed; dejectedly, he snapped his fingers above his head as an extreme invocation to the gods; and, miserably, he glided ahead.

My heart sang. I was on my last lap towards "The Hills of Fear".

* * *

We advanced for more than an hour—in a northerly direction, as far as I could judge. We moved from animal path to animal path, without ever seeing a living creature, through that same unreal atmosphere of sombre immobility and straining silence. All nature waited. And that tense feeling of expectancy, which millions of plants, and billions of beasts and fowls and insects shared and contributed to, until it became unbearable.

Then, the elements burst their chains, the wind broke loose. With a frightful clamour, it shook the myriads of leaves, branches, and lianas, out of each of which it wrung a tortured lament. Then it was gone—as suddenly as it had come.

Boro looked wildly around for shelter as, high above the leafy ceiling, the thunder exploded. Broadside after broadside of formidable cannonades burst out across the sky and, as they died into the distance, new batteries competed for mastery over the jungle's amplifying echoes.

Boro found a tree-trunk of colossal dimensions, rushed to it and flattened himself against it.

Lightning stabbed at the endless expanse of higher vegetation, and loud cracks told of the great trees which it struck and instantly killed—each crack being followed by a prolonged crashing as the trees fell. The first vanguard of big raindrops smashed heavily through the green layers above, rebounded from the different stratas of leaves and reached the thick mat of rotting vegetation on the ground, from which an acrid, sulphurous smell arose.

At my feet, Boro had shrunk into a pitiful mound of quivers and whimpers.

Then the real rain came—cataracts and cataracts of water—bringing with it more wind, fresh blasts of thunder, renewed

cracklings of lightning, and a continuous crumbling and collapsing of mammoth trees.

Then everything happened too quickly. I turned my head, just in time to catch a glimpse of a huge shape emerging darkly from the shadows on my right. Boro's tiny figure sprang up, darted out from between the protruberant tree-trunk and myself, and brushed past me. A ball of fire blinded my eyes and struck a nearby tree with a shattering report. From my left close at hand yet as faintly as if it were miles away, came another yell from Boro: "Mulahu!"

Then something immense loomed above me. My head was smitten by a terrific blow. A sickening pain pierced my brain, and filled it with red bubbles, green stars and aching golden comets.

A buzzing which grew steadily louder filled my ears, and gently, carried me off into another world—a world of opalescent mists, of utter silence, of peace. . . .

* * *

My eyes opened, and stared into the darkness of night. My ears caught a soothing sound of dripping water. I tried to think, but couldn't. Each beat of my pulse was like a drill boring deep into my temples. I do not know how long I remained there, in that helpless daze.

I do not know how long I had been unconscious, either. For when the pains which ran up and down my soaked, stiff, chilly limbs compelled me to sit up, the hands of the luminous dial of my wrist watch indicated a time which had long since passed. At first, as I looked at it, I could see only a blur, but my squinting eyes slowly made out its meaning. One hand, the shorter, was nearer to five than to four, the other almost over the nine. The watch had stopped at 4:44, the time that—that something had knocked me down.

Something, yes. But, what was it? Thoughts came back in a flood, and with a roar that gave me a violent feeling of nausea down in my stomach. I remembered it all, now: the hurricane; the huge charging shadow; the tiny figure of Boro fleeing; the bolt of lightning striking a tree-trunk; the crushing blow hitting me. . . .

No, it was not a nightmare. My hand went up to my head, and hastily retreated. There was a big bump there—sticky, aching, throbbing. Little by little, my eyes explored the surrounding black-

ness and stopped to stare at a winking glimmer of light. It was the stump of a nearby tree, felled by the lightning and still burning.

Boro. Where was he? I tried to call, and winced. I gulped and tried again. "Boro," I said. "Boro!" I shouted.

There was no answer. No movement. Nothing but that dripping of water—"The little rain of trees", as the pygmies call the protracted dribbling from leaf to leaf that follows a heavy rain. What had happened to him? Had he been killed? Or had he simply been knocked down, too?

"I must find him," I thought. "At once. To help him, and to save myself from being lost, irreparably lost."

My whole body shrank from the effort of getting up, but my fear won, bringing me to my feet. Half blindly, I reached for support. My hand grabbed the nearest branch, and a cold shower fell upon me. It was as painful as a shower of needles. But it cleared my mind.

Only then did I realize, completely, the gravity of my situation. I was wounded, weakened by loss of blood, exhausted with fatigue and lack of food. Boro was dead (or unconscious, or gone). My rifle was no longer in my hands, nor in the mud in which I had lain. I was unarmed, lost and completely helpless. For a moment, a paralysing fear gnawed at my stomach. I felt my knees turn to water; I was finished.

Then a word echoed through my mind. "Mulahu!" Boro had cried. He had seen the creature—and he had not died on the spot. "Mulahu!" I heard again; from inside me, this time, and my instinct of self-preservation answered. "Fire," it ordered, and quickened all my senses. "Fire, fire," it persisted. That was my only protection—against the night, against prowling creatures and against the gigantic ape which might still be in the vicinity.

"Fire, fire, fire."

All other thoughts vanished. That one drove me on. It made me stagger through cold, drenching, scratching curtains of vegetation. It gave me the strength to reach the burning stump. It kept me awake long enough to find, up against an adjoining tree-trunk, a niche which was dry, warm, and dimly lit by the steadily glowing blaze.

Then, into that niche, I collapsed.

LOST IN THE MULAHU'S KINGDOM

IT WAS the same instinct of self-preservation which took over when the pale light of morning woke me up. My first impulse was to yawn and stretch, but I didn't. Something stronger than myself compelled me not to move an inch, not to make a sound, not even to open my eyes properly.

Peering between half-closed eyelids, I saw little at first; nothing but mist and smoke, and the two jagged red lines made by the stump and the lower end of the fallen trunk, both of which were still being consumed by a slow fire. Beyond that, there were only immobile vague shapes, which were evidently, nothing but trees, bushes, lianas, whose contours were confused and made unreal by the weakness of the light.

Yet, I could not move, nor was my mind, much as it attempted to concentrate on the urgency of my predicament, able to produce a thought. All I could do was to look into the mist in front of me; and wait, wait, in anxious suspense.

No one can measure the length of such minutes. But finally, what my subconscious had detected with such alarm, revealed itself. A crackle from the red embers which crowned the stump was followed by a low grunt, and there was a shower of tiny sparks. On the other side of the stump these sparks gave rise to a second, louder grunt. One of the confused shapes moved. It was a ponderous body—turning round, then rising, higher and higher, and approaching—all of this with liquid movements that made no noise at all.

The shortest instant of time can be more than sufficient to fix, on the retina of the human eye, an image in all its details, an image

which has the sharpness of a perfectly focused photograph, and which remains with the onlooker forever.

So it was then. The gigantic brute stood there for only a brief instant, towering high over me. It growled. It went down on to all fours again. Its form faded into the mist, vanished away. All this happened quicker than I can describe it. But I can still see the reddish-black, wavy fur of its immense uplifted arms, the colossal girth of its stomach, and above all, that disconcertingly huge head, which was made eyeless, even faceless, by the long white curtain of hair falling from the protruding line of the brow.

I had seen the Mulahul

My heart started beating again. As if to make up for lost throbs, it began to thump madly, and my thoughts raced with it. I realized that the monster could have smashed me to bits with one gesture of those arms—that it would have done so, had I made the least movement. My instinct had saved me, by making me pretend to be dead.

Saved? Yes, perhaps; but how much better off was I simply for having been spared? I had finally found the creature I had hunted for so long, and all to no end. My guide, my rifle, my camera, were gone. I was alone, weak, hungry, feverish. I was hopelessly lost, unlikely ever to see my wife again, irrevocably condemned to death, be it quick or slow, painful or not.

But was I? The light was increasing, the mist lifting. The long sleep and constant warmth had given me back some of my strength. If I could not find Boro alive, I ought to be able to locate my rifle, at least. In any case, of course, the ordeal ahead of me was a tough one. But, though I had always been convinced of the impossibility of finding my way through the jungle, now that I *had* to do so, now that it was simply a question of survival, there was, at least, a chance that such a purely theoretical speculation would prove unfounded. Also, for millions of years the jungle had given sustenance to millions of animals and human beings. Why shouldn't I find in it enough nourishment to keep me going—for a week, or two if necessary; until I could reach my little camp—or Boro, or Amisi, or the other group of hunters. Certainly some of them must be looking for me, even now.

Everything appeared in a different light from what it did last night. I was in the hell of a mess; no doubt about that. But I wasn't desperate. Somewhere, somehow, I must find a way. . . .

When I reckoned that three minutes had passed, I decided to risk moving. Cautiously I got up. I surveyed the little space which the fall of the tree had carved out of the vegetation and made visible. I made a slow detour around the stump, and began to inspect the ground. If what I had seen and felt had not been a dream, some mark ought to be there to prove it—a footprint, a spore, a hair, perhaps.

The search was difficult. The ground was thickly covered with packed, rotting leaves, and my muscles were all very sore. Bending down made the bump on my head pound frightfully. Each crackle among the embers of the fire startled me violently. But I had seen the Mulahu, damn it all. I couldn't have imagined it, I couldn't otherwise have felt so strongly the menace of its presence and even sniffed its gorilla-like smell, which was more potent than the acrid smoke of the burning wood.

I couldn't find a thing. Had it been a vision then? Or an image produced by delirium, an image which had all the aspects of reality?

Then I discovered a small patch of mud. And in it . . . gosh! The proof was there all right. I saw the recent imprint of a foot, a foot which was absolutely human in appearance except for its size. It had a big toe which was as divaricated as that of a pygmy, but in all, it was three or four times larger and longer than a pygmy's foot. There was only one—but that one was a perfect footprint. Any scientist would have given a fortune to take a cast of that footprint. And I, who in that very hope had carted around with me pounds of plaster of Paris for months and months—there I was, without a pinch of it.

"As if it would do you much good anyway!" said a voice inside me.

I was so disgusted that I stamped my foot down into that mark in the mud, which was almost twice as long and as wide as the print made by my boot. It was a mark such as only one other white man, perhaps, had ever seen. And he had died. Was I, too, to meet the same fate? In a resurgence of oppressing gloom, I wondered. . . .

That was the morning of Wednesday. Of the rest of that day, of Thursday and Friday, and of the three miserable nights that followed each of those interminable days, I have only the painful, bedazzled recollections one keeps of a nightmare. Looking at it in retrospect, I cannot bring myself to believe that such an eternity of misery and despair could be contained within the narrow limits of only seventy-two hours.

I vaguely remember burning with fever, just as I remember the shaking of my hands and the whistling in my ears. I have a hazy recollection of my continuous preoccupation with the problems of nourishment, and shelter, of conserving my strength, and catching sufficiently frequent glimpses of the sun, to direct my stumbling steps.

My worst worry was about my wife. Ellen wouldn't expect me for a week. But the porters were sure to abandon my little camp—if they hadn't done so already. They wouldn't dare to go back to Amisi's. But, even if they hid in some other village, news was bound to spread fast, and the natives' attitude, if not their words, would warn her. It was even possible that all the hunters, their families and our own boys would run off, leaving her alone, and helpless. . . .

Wild beasts, strangely enough, were what I fretted least about, even before I found my rifle. Not even the Mulahu worried me. For every pace I took got me farther away from the Hills of Fear. Siku's knife-cuts itched and his magic root and whistles were still in my pockets. Would I be so silly as to use the latter if I met a Mulahu? Certainly, I would, for what other weapon did I have? Only, I had a feeling that, for the time being, there wasn't to be another encounter. I still wished for one—but only if I could first find my rifle. IF . . .

At night, it was worse, of course. Pairs of gleaming eyes often circled around. Whether they belonged to dangerous beasts or not, didn't worry me. Behind my back there stood the insuperable wall of some arboreal colossus. Between me and those eyes, there was always the defence of a sheet of flame—which I took good care to keep roaring. It wasn't the best way to get any real sleep. Still, it was safe, dry and warm, and it gave me enough rest to start again in the morning.

During the day, the noise of my tired trampling was my best protection. Animate things moved, crawled, crept, crashed away, to my right and my left, ahead and behind, above my head and under my boots. But, somehow, I didn't care, except that I kept a wary eye for snakes.

All my faculties were concentrated upon sticking to a southward direction. That was what I was sure I was doing all the time. It meant that every new step I took brought me away from the prohibited territory, and towards our clearing; farther away from the Mulahu, nearer to my wife. How much longer would it take? I tried not to speculate about it—or about the Mulahu; I already had enough to worry me, without adding the fearsome thought of that beast!

* * *

I remember some particularly trying moments, too. Especially when I retraced my steps to the protruding tree-trunk under whose shelter Boro had crumpled at the start of the hurricane, and where I had been knocked down at the time unalterably fixed by my smashed watch: 4:44. That was the first thing I did on Wednesday morning, immediately after I had come upon the Mulahu's footprint. I was sure I would find my rifle; but, much as I searched, I could discover no trace of it. I hoped to find my camera intact, my helmet still usable. I saw them at once. But the latter was reduced to the state of a sad pancake, the former smashed so badly that I hesitated before deciding to take it up.

I hadn't the slightest expectation of finding any sign that would help me to understand what had happened there. Instead, how much was there to read! What the stretch of mud around the abutting tree-trunk revealed, was too shocking to be forgotten.

I wouldn't be prepared to swear to it, because, much as I have learned to read tracks, I cannot say that what I saw in them was confirmed by any precise recollection of events. They were too hazy and confused, those recollections. But if I interpreted correctly those deep tracks close to where I had stood and fallen, it was the Mulahu that had struck me down—not the lightning, nor a big branch broken by it, as I had at first supposed. This seemed logical, too. Boro had shouted and rushed away. It was more than natural

that the Mulahu—the same one, I was sure—should have chased the rapidly vanishing Boro. Passing near me, the beast had just pushed me out of the way; or struck me intentionally; in any case, it had smacked me down. That was exactly what a giant gorilla, too, would have done under such circumstances.

Then, nearby, the tree destroyed by the lightning had fallen—who knows with what accompaniment of crackling explosions. The Mulahu had stopped, undecided. It had returned, found me lifeless, lost any interest in me and gone off to its cave or wherever else it slept.

In the morning, either a suspicion latent in its quasi-human memory, or some noise I made in my sleep, had compelled it to come back. It had found me in the niche. It had come as near as it dared to the burning stump, turned around, in its queer way, the better to watch me through its legs, with its eyes unencumbered by the hairy curtain. Again it had seen that I was as immobile as the dead. The shower of sparks had annoyed it and sent it away for good.

But Boro? Boro had seen, recognized the Mulahu, had even shouted its fearful name. And he had not died; his faith in the *dawa* had saved him. Far from dying—if one could judge by the few, light toetracks I found—he had sprinted like a gazelle. I followed these imprints to the end of the mud patch. After that I was on my own.

I remember stopping to look back at that bit of jungle where so much had happened to me. That picture is another one that nothing will ever erase.

I studied the shadows, I plotted my course, and I plunged into the dark ocean of green, dripping entanglements. What confidence I didn't feel, I tried to build up by sheer will power. No winding of animal paths, I determined, would fool me; no obstacle, nothing would succeed in diverting me from my only hope of salvation. Whatever might happen, I was determined to stick to a straight southward course.

18

TWO SHOTS: A CRY

THE NEXT thing I remember vividly happened also in the morning—on Thursday.

My head was better, the fever had gone down. My sleep had been fitful, but I felt refreshed. My stomach groaned, but again I gorged myself with handfuls of the fruit and seeds and flowers which I had often seen natives eat with gusto. I couldn't say I enjoyed this fare, but it had already kept me going for almost two days.

Yesterday I had marched until twilight, always southward. However much I might have gone off my route, I said to myself, I ought soon to be out of the prohibited territory. A few more minutes, and I would again see tracks of human feet. A few more hours, and I could hope to meet some natives, or to hear a hunter's call. Another day, and I might reach home. . . .

Before starting the day's march, however, I had to find a clearing where I could see the sky, to make sure of my direction. It didn't take me long. Stronger light guided me to a good-sized glade. Before stepping into it, I craned my neck to see if the open space was deserted. It was—no, it wasn't. In the grass, just where a beam of sunlight kissed it, my eyes caught a metallic glitter. A snake, I thought—a black mamba, in all probability. Better be careful.

I held my breath, listening; there was not the faintest sound. A slight breeze blew across the glade, gently bending the grass. There was a new glitter, in exactly the same place. There was something unnatural in that immobility. It could not be a dead mamba, for, then, its skin would not shine so brightly.

I debated for a while what to do. I saw a small stone at my feet: I took it up and threw it. It fell short, but near enough to irritate any

snake. Yet the glitter was still there. I advanced towards it, I lost sight of it, I approached closer.

Then I recognized the thing. I rushed forward, as if fearing that it would escape. I bent and reached for it and clutched it and brought it up against my cheek, as if to embrace it.

It was my rifle. It was covered with mud, but in perfect order. I tried the bolt. It worked smoothly. I lifted the barrel and fired a shot. Then, while I counted twenty, a forgotten picture flashed before my eyes.

I again saw myself near the abutting tree-trunk. As the hurricane exploded, I remembered wiping the rain from my eyes *with both hands*. That meant that my hands were not encumbered by the rifle, evidently I had handed it to Boro, as soon as we had reached shelter, to protect the gun from the rain. Yes, that was what I had automatically done. Then the enormous black shadow had approached and, no less automatically, Boro, blinded by terror, had taken the rifle in his flight. He had run far, as far as he could. Exhausted, breathless, he had thrown the rifle away and—lighter, then—he had continued his forced march. In what direction? Probably towards the waiting porters. Yes, this must be what had happened. And I was on the right course.

. . . Eighteen. Nineteen. Twenty. . . .

I fired again. Four shots at twenty-second intervals was the S.O.S., the signal of extreme distress which all my natives knew about.

One. Two. Three. . . .

I was safe, now. The miracle of it—following Boro's same course. I must be almost within hearing distance of our clearing—practically home.

. . . Fourteen. Fifteen. Sixteen. . . .

A few more seconds, and someone was going to answer. I fired the third shot and started counting again.

"No, I must not cheat by rushing ahead of the seconds. I am practically there, anyhow."

The fourth shot. Now, for the answering cry.

I cursed the colobus monkeys who shrieked with fear in the distance. I strained my ears until they throbbed; I placed, first one, then the other, against the ground, as the pygmies do to detect far

noises. In that way I caught the sound of a distant hammering of hoofs; but nothing else. A frantic fear took hold of me and shook me from aching head to sore feet. It sharpened my wits. It made my eyes discover what they had until then overlooked—the tiny ribbon of bent grass which still showed Boro's path. The blades were bent *towards* me.

The implication was shattering. It meant that Boro, instead of going on from where he had thrown the rifle, had *come* to that point. And that he had continued in the very direction from which I had arrived.

But, then. . . .

My legs had no intention of carrying me. But I had to know. Those grass-blades were too terribly eloquent. Slowly, I made myself follow them, in the same direction as Boro's feet had gone. After a while I came to a bit of uncovered soil. The mud had almost dried, but Boro's toes had left deep marks in it—as if they had passed that way more than a day before, when the rain had just formed the mud.

My heart, my head, my legs, were all abruptly filled with lead. But I forced myself to go back to where the gun, now so unbearably heavy in my hand, had lain in the grass; then farther on, across the remaining part of the glade, into the animal path from which Boro had emerged. It was some sort of diabolical fascination that drew me forward. If my suspicion proved to be fact, I would have to give up. But, if it was the last thing I did, I had to know.

Now, how could I have marched two whole days, always convinced that I was going steadily towards the south—and instead turned in a complete circle, returning practically to my starting point? It just could not have happened. It was something that I would not be able to do, even if I tried—even for ten million dollars. It was just impossible, that's all, absolutely impossible. . . .

After a few minutes Boro's footprints swerved at a sharp angle. Then they vanished. Like an automaton, I crashed through a cluster of bushes. Beyond them, there was a stretch of mud. I couldn't bear it, but I had to lift my eyes. Before me, unmistakable, stood the abutting tree-trunk.

Only the rifle saved me.

"Don't give up," it seemed to whisper to me. "Don't give up."

After a while, the voice became compelling. I got up and reloaded the rifle from my belt. I retraced my path to the glade. Beyond it, I followed Boro's trail, until I lost it, and after that, I didn't even attempt to find it again. I just marched on; on and on and on. I do not know why. Nor do I know where I went, nor what my eyes saw nor even if they registered anything at all. I do not know if I ever stopped to drink, nor if I ate anything, or what I did.

Of those hours, and of the night and the morning that followed them, I have no remembrance at all.

Then, at about midday on Friday, a sound rescued my consciousness from its "fade-out", suddenly bringing it back into focus. One moment, I was limp, unaware and somewhat delirious. The next, I was wide awake, with all my nerves tense and my ears alert, desperately praying for a repetition of the sound which had so abruptly electrified my whole being.

It came. It was a distant thud. It was barely audible above the crickets' shrill chorus. But there couldn't be any mistake about it. It was a rifle shot.

In a second I was up, and my gun was roaring—not at regular, calculated intervals, but just as quickly as I could press the trigger, reload, and press the trigger again. One, two, three. . . . four times.

Counting was my only way of gauging the passage of time. I waited two full minutes. I counted to a hundred and fifty. There was no answer. At a hundred and eighty, I could keep still no longer. Plenty of shells remained in my cartridge belt. So I reloaded the gun, and again fired four shots, but at correctly-spaced intervals, this time.

Only the crickets replied, their chorus shriller after the pause caused by the detonations. I couldn't understand it.

I ran. I didn't take any chance. This time I knew the direction from which the two shots had come. I simply charged straight there. To hell with the tricky, deceiving animal paths. I just crashed through whatever barred my way. Trees, I had to avoid, but

everything else I ignored. Head down, my left arm lifted to give some protection to the still agonizingly painful bump, I bulldozed through. With my right hand, I held the gun diagonally across my chest. Bit by bit, my clothes were torn away from me. My shins knocked against big lianas and low branches. Blood oozed out of dozens of scratches. Sweat made my eyes smart, put a keener sting into each fresh cut, a new bite into Siku's eight knife-slashes. Each extra pain only spurred me on, at a faster pace.

After a long while (I haven't the slightest idea how long), my lungs checked me, brought me to a faltering halt. My hands shook so badly that I had to drop the rifle. I followed it to the ground. I stretched. I tried breathing deeply to control my panting. Then I staggered up. Again I fired. Again I listened.

I heard a cry—a queer sort of choked cry, but undoubtedly uttered by a human being.

The brief pause, instead of giving me rest, had turned my muscles to jelly. Now, the fear of missing my only remaining hope of salvation, forced that jelly to act almost like muscles. I swayed, I stumbled but I staggered ahead. When my ears buzzed too loudly, I stopped. Before my hands could obey my will and fire the rifle again, before my throat could consent to give way to a yell, I heard a call.

"Bwana!"

It was weak and stifled—but near. It was unrecognizable, but it could only have come from one of my native friends. Which one, it didn't matter. It was one of them—in serious trouble, because of me; in danger of life, perhaps, for having come to my rescue. Once I realized this, the result was startling. I forgot all about myself. The weight of my past ordeal dropped from my shoulders. All worry about what might still be in store for me vanished. My lungs, my heart, my ears, my fever, no longer bothered me. An influx of vigour gave fresh suppleness to my legs, new sharpness to my senses.

The jungle I again ignored. The entangled barriers which attempted to hold me back from the humble, wheezy voice, I simply went through; the shoulder-high vegetation which followed, I just dived into. Even before I knew I had come to an exceptionally large clearing, my eyes adjusted themselves to the suddenly strong

light which flooded it and detected a small, barely noticeable movement to one side.

"Here . . . Bwana . . ." called an anguished, muted voice. "Here!"

"Coming!" Two more leaps, and I parted the last screen of greenery.

The sight which awaited me there, in that sort of huge nest of trampled luscious grass, stopped me as abruptly as if I had run smack into an iron bulkhead. An old man lay there, in the rigidity of death. I saw only the back of his neck, but I knew him, even without seeing his face. The man was Siku, the sorcerer. My old overcoat, still on him, was now ripped by a huge bloody hole in the middle of the back. His hands were frozen above his head, and clasped—of all things—the barrel of my missing spare rifle.

"Bwana . . ." I was certain I heard again.

How could a dead man speak? Had I gone crazy?

19

THE MULAHU'S KILL

"B^{WANA. . .}"

It was not a word, so much as a moan. And it came from under the corpse.

Finally, I understood.

"Kommanda!" I cried.

In a fraction of a minute I had reached the spot. I rolled away the sorcerer's body, and my good, faithful boy was free.

What a mess he was in! Blood was smeared all over his greyish face and had soaked the jersey and shorts of his uniform. Blood from the gaping wound in Siku's chest. Blood from a large, deep cut in Kommanda's own left arm.

"I . . . I . . ."

I told him to shut up, to keep his eyes closed, to relax and not to worry. What remained of my shirt was just enough to improvise a tourniquet above the slash in Kommanda's arm. Using a shell from my belt, I tightened this tourniquet until the hemorrhage was checked. His sleeve I ripped off at the first pull.

I looked at Kommanda's belt; my brandy flask was still fastened to it. I could have done with a sip myself, but he needed it more than I did. He tried to protest, but I forced the flask between his clenched teeth. What brandy remained, I sprinkled carefully over his wound. He winced with pain. He attempted to move his right hand, but couldn't. His eyes opened and looked imploringly into mine. "There . . .," he said, turning his head a little to the right. "The. . . ."

I glanced at the macabre figure of Siku, frozen into one piece with the rifle, the butt-end of which pointed towards the sky, the barrel-mouth towards his shattered chest. It was then that,

between Kommanda and him, I saw the sorcerer's ceremonial knife, lying on the grass, red to the hilt. I didn't touch it. Instead, I turned in the other direction to look for what Kommanda so desperately wanted me to find.

Partially covered by the trampled grass were two objects: a familiar green canvas bag and a parcel of bark-cloth, such as the natives used to carry, to protect their choicest food. My eyes became misty. Even while fighting with death, Kommanda had forced his consciousness to stay with him, for just so long as it took me to reach him—until he had made sure I should find the only other possession I had entrusted to him, the plaster of Paris kit. And that package of food!

Had it not been for the cake of honey and banana-flour which I found in the parcel, I would probably have crumbled into a senseless heap of utter exhaustion. As it was, a few morsels gave me the stamina to pull Kommanda, still in a faint, to the shadow of a tree; to ease the tourniquet; to bandage his wound with length upon length of cheese-cloth from the plaster of Paris box; and to retrace my steps to a rivulet across which I remembered having splashed, not long before I reached him.

A good deal more of the cake, repeated sips of cool water, abundant ablutions, and above all Kommanda's nearness and the hope that he was going to survive, made another man of me. I brought back half the cake, and some water in the flask and in the metal bowl from the plaster of Paris kit. I deposited everything between Kommanda and me and lay down in the shadow near my boy. Then I closed my eyes.

I wanted to turn over in my mind my wife's situation. Did she know what had happened? Had the natives deserted her—my *Madamu*, as they called her? I wanted to work out what had brought Kommanda and Siku to this vast clearing which I had never seen before. Why had they attacked each other? What had happened to Amisi and his men, to Boro and to the porters? I wanted to think about the Mulahu, the probable nearness of one of the beasts, the disastrous effects that those last few days would have on my quest. During the previous days, I had wondered and worried a great deal. Was the Mulahu I had seen a fifth anthropoid? Or

was it just of another, quite different, race of giant gorilla? Was I going to be its discoverer—or was I just going to fall flat on my face, there, in that clearing, the victim of a second, fatal attack of blackwater?

To hell with it all. My mind simply refused to function. My tormented stomach was now at peace, satisfied. Kommanda wasn't a deserter, a thief, a traitor; he was there, at my side—honest, loyal, brave and faithful as ever. Tomorrow, or the day after, he would be strong enough to guide me back—to my wife, to our clearing, to safety, to cleanness, to some decent comfort. . . . To hell! Yes, to hell with everything else. I went to sleep.

It was the first, real sleep I had had during all those days. It stretched through unknown hours of bliss. Then, slowly, it began to taper out into a reluctant awakening.

I opened my eyes. I sat up. Kommanda was snoring; the native's extraordinary power for recovery had accomplished another miracle. While I slept, he had come round from his faint and, before plunging into that restoring slumber of his, he had drunk all the water, eaten the cake to the last crumb. I grinned with relief. The fact that Kommanda had used up all the food was more eloquent than a long speech. It meant he knew that the following day he would be able to walk, to guide me out of the taboo territory and back to our base camp—before I needed any more substantial nourishment. That is, we were within a day's march, or less. The nightmare was actually reaching its end!

The sunlight was weakening rapidly. What had pulled me out of my sleep was the necessity of gathering, before darkness set in, enough dry wood to last us throughout the night. I also got some water, and I filled up Kommanda's fez with fruit for him. Then, I turned to my last task, a distasteful one—that of getting back my spare rifle. I didn't need or want it. But I felt I had to take it out of Siku's hand, for Kommanda's sake.

Obstinately obdurate even in his death, the old sorcerer made my job as gruesome and difficult as he could. Horrible insects (sticky flies and biting ants) had already gathered around him in buzzing, hissing, crawling masses, which tried to help his dead body to repel me. But I gave a last jerk, and he had to relinquish the gun. *The*

weapon which killed him, I reflected as I returned to Kommanda. *Just as I had sworn it would.* "If any of the Mayaka dies," I had said on that week's far far Monday afternoon. . . . I had never meant it seriously. Even now I didn't know if any Mayaka had actually died in the hunt. Yet a fickle fate had taken up my word and kept it for me! Using one of my last big matches, I lit the fire and sat, with my back to a tree-trunk.

A light breeze arose, gave voice to grass and leaves and branches. Out of the diffused murmur, Siku's voice spoke to me. Again I heard his solemn oath: "No one shall die in the hunt, who has received the true *dawa*".

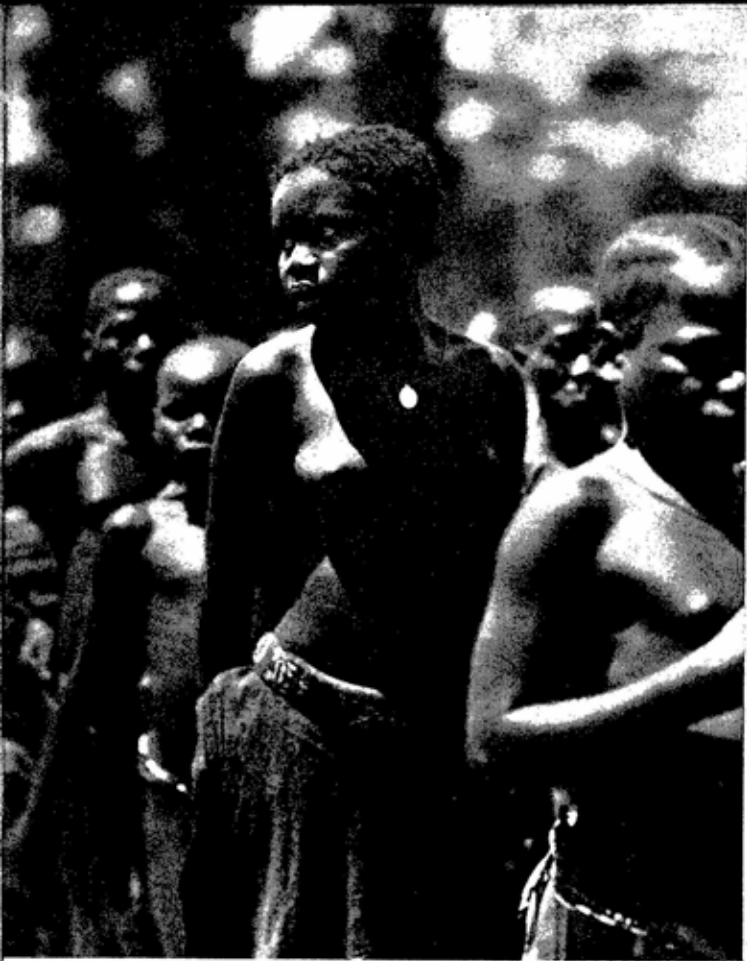
I stiffened. For the first time for ages, it seemed, my head was clear enough to think. Siku's words struck a chord. "*No one shall die, who has received the true dawa.*" Over and over again, I repeated the sorcerer's parting speech. Just as Amisi had done that Monday night, only five days before. Like him, I struggled to grasp the secret meaning hidden beneath those words.

Then, all of a sudden, I saw light—and felt a shiver down my spine. Now, I began to understand. What a fool I had been not to see it before! The answer to all the questions which had puzzled me, the key to the horrible, irreparable events I now knew I was soon to learn about, lay in Siku's hatred for Amisi, in his consuming ambition to become Headman, and in his distrust of his confederate, Boro. It lay in those passions—and in Kommanda's unshakable loyalty to me.

Instantly, I found myself transported back, in my memory, to our clearing. Four weeks vanished. The past was projected into the present, and I began to live over again the Sunday when I had first tackled Amisi about the Mulahu . . .

It is Kommanda who listens in to our conversation, after all; not to snoop on us, but to keep a watch on Boro, whom he has probably seen spying on us before and has suspected of being Siku's secret accomplice.

Then—then Amisi and I rush to find out who is there. While we follow the fleeing Boro, Kommanda hides. Later, in some way, he learns that Boro has reported to Siku, and that the two are planning some dirty trick against Amisi and myself. He doesn't dare to talk



Amendobo (centre), Siku's mistress.



Boro had a cocky air that morning.

Mrs. Gatti undergoing the treatment for "protection" against the Mulahu.



without first securing stronger proof—or some powerful weapon. So he carefully prepares for action. That night, when his plans are ripe, he disappears.

That is how, and why, the two women, Mayomba and Amendobo, vanish so mysteriously. It is Kommanda who kidnaps them. He takes them to some safe place, in Bambuba territory, where he leaves them under good guard.

With the women in his possession, Kommanda blackmails (let's say) Siku into coming to give us the *dawa*, Boro into helping the sorcerer, both into keeping their mouths shut. Siku submits, and so does Boro; they have to. But the avaricious little squirt grabs at the chance of starting a racket of his own. He, too, blackmails Siku—and with success, for he gets a share of the gifts I am having to give, of the price I am going to pay. And, despite all Siku's previous refusals, Boro, too, gets inoculated, which means that he may now safely participate in the Mulahu hunt, be my guide, earn the big reward I have promised.

On the next day, however, hurricane and Mulahu together prove too much for Boro. His belief in the *dawa* keeps him alive. But he sees me struck down, chooses to believe me dead and runs away. Where to? Naturally, to Siku.

However, Kommanda has taken no chances. He is still keeping a close watch on Siku. The two women are still safely hidden away, in the hands of reliable friends. He also has my spare rifle. Even if he knows little about how to use it, he makes the most of possessing it. When Boro comes to Siku, Kommanda appears and bears down upon them both with everything he has. Perhaps he doesn't believe I am dead. In any case, he realizes what is going to happen; that, as soon as the news spreads, every Mayaka and pygmy and Bambuba, probably even our boys, will be terrorized and that—far from consenting to enter the Mulahu territory, they will all flee deep into their parts of the jungle, where no administrator will be able to find them.

Little as Kommanda can understand the work of his Bwana and of his *Madamu*, he realizes that our hopes have been shattered. Above all, he knows that *Madamu*, even if left derelict and helpless in our clearing, will never consent to leave it without first learning

what has happened to me. Anyway, he is too loyal to let me (or my body) be abandoned in the Mulahu's jungle. He compels the sorcerer to come to look for me.

He forces Boro to lead them to the point where I have last been seen, to the abutting tree-trunk. Or, perhaps, if one of the two groups of hunters is still in the prohibited territory, Kommanda first tries to locate it, so that there may be enough men to carry me, if necessary, and enough to defend me and themselves against the Mulahu. If such a group is still out, it is undoubtedly Amisi's and Kommanda will certainly worry about his friend, too.

Be that as it may, on Friday morning Kommanda lifts the rifle, ready to fire it—either against an animal, or hoping to attract my attention. But Siku leaps at him, and there is a ferocious fight. While trying to ward off the gun, Siku stabs Kommanda. In the mêlée, the gun goes off and the big soft-nosed bullet smashes through the chest of Siku, who drops the knife and falls on top of Kommanda. The poor boy is stunned, bleeding to death, and half-choked by the body on top of him. He tries to free himself but cannot. He is half gone, but before losing all consciousness, he musters enough strength to reload and to fire once again. As it is impossible for him to do otherwise, he shoots the second shot through his foe's bloody wound. . . .

GRIM ANSWER TO A YET UNRECEIVED
LETTER

THIS last macabre touch to my reconstruction of the story, abruptly brought my mind back to Kommanda's condition. His snores had ceased; he was breathing quietly, his face relaxed. Soon, he would awake, perfectly able to speak, I was sure, and to corroborate practically all I had finally succeeded in understanding. But he would have to tell me a great deal more.

If my surmise was correct, what had happened to Boro? Why was he not there? And why had Siku tried to kill Kommanda that morning? Had it been to stop him from finding me, or because something had happened to change Siku's attitude from reluctant compliance to sudden violence? It must have been something more important to the sorcerer than the life of his lover. Had he learned where Kommanda had hidden her? Or, had he . . .

In that split second, the light which had come to me spread, to reveal the rest of the unknown. . . .

"Hell!" I was so excited that I must have said this aloud.

"Yes, Bwana," said Kommanda sitting up. "It is the work of evil."

"Take it easy," I told him. And for the time being, I said no more. For one doesn't inquire of a wounded, but recovering, hunter if he is feeling well, when his voice is almost back to normal. One doesn't thank him for having saved one's life, lest the hunter's humility be embarrassed. One doesn't need any thanks either for what little one has done, when the hunter's eyes are reflecting the flames of the fire with such glittering lights of deep gratitude. One doesn't

even have to ask the question one wants to ask—a question which might seem most egotistical under the circumstances. The brave hunter is also a faithful, devoted companion, who knows for himself what weighs heaviest on his Bwana's heart.

"*Madamu*," said Kommanda, "is deep in worry and alone. But she is well. And before another sun sets you shall be with her."

I breathed with relief.

"Have all the hunters and their families gone?" I asked.

"All of them," answered Kommanda.

"And all the villagers of Amisi's clearing?"

"All of them."

"And our boys?"

"Gone."

"And the porters I left near my little tent?"

"Gone."

"And the hunters on my right?"

"Gone."

"And those of Amisi?"

"Dead," said Kommanda, his face sad, grave.

"And Amisi himself?"

"Dead."

"And Boro?"

"Dead."

"Killed by the Mulahu?"

Kommanda hesitated a second. Then: "Yes, Bwana," he said. "But even more by Siku."

I nodded. "Drink plenty," I said, "but slowly."

Now it was all perfectly clear. And it was too late to do anything about it. I knew, too, that for the time being, my quest for the Mulahu was finished. Yes, finished—in that very clearing, where a Mulahu had been not many hours before.

The following morning, since Kommanda's kit was at hand, I would take a plaster of Paris cast of a Mulahu's footprint. This thought, which until a few days before would have been a most exciting one, now involved no uncertainty. Nor was there any thrill in it.

I felt in my bones that a second, perhaps fatal attack of blackwater

homa was upon me. Regardless of how I would (or wouldn't) come out of it, I knew damned well that that one cast of a gigantic, human-like foot, together with the hairs Amisi had given me, and the unforgettable picture of the titanic monster watching me from beyond a burning stump, would be all I would be able to salvage of that expedition.

Thanks to Kommanda, my wife and I (taking with us only what we three could carry) would cross a completely deserted jungle sparsely studded with abandoned villages. Then we would reach the road. We would have to part from Kommanda, perhaps for ever—and try to get as fast as possible to some place where there was a decent hospital, with up-to-date staff and facilities.

And then?

Then, there were two possibilities. If they couldn't get me over that confounded blackwater once more, Dr. Morais would be right—and I wrong . . . and my sweet Ellen would be the loser. If they did manage to pull me out of the mess, I had no doubt that some day in the future we would come back and start all over again from the beginning.

In the meantime, one way or another, this expedition of ours had ended in disaster. The hunt, at the very best, was over, for a long, long time to come. And everything else was lost—including eight human lives, about which there was nothing, nothing I could do. Although—yes, there was one small, small thing I could do. At least I could protect Kommanda, to whom I owed so much. At least I could keep him from getting into serious trouble with the far, at times totally un-understanding, authorities.

To accomplish this purpose, I would have to let the powers that be think that Siku had died the same strange death as Amisi, his three Mayaka hunters, his two pygmies, and Boro. Had I known then of the letter from the T.A. of Irumu, which was waiting for me at the Poste Restante of that little town, I could have thought up the same answer which I did give to it later on—that is telling the truth, nothing but the truth, and only this tiny speck less than the whole truth.

As for the two missing women, I didn't worry. I knew that in due time Kommanda would take care to have them returned to

their villages. I knew, too, that he would see to it that they didn't talk—not for any A.T.'s ears, anyway.

When Kommanda had slowly drained the bowl of water, I asked him where the seven dead hunters were.

"There," he said, pointing toward the centre of the big clearing. "In the grass, not far from where you found me, Bwana." Then he went on to explain.

With Siku and Boro, the evening before, he had found Amisi and his men. Searching all together, they had discovered my tracks. I didn't remember ever having seen that particular clearing; yet my footprints led them into it.

The group had been crossing the open space, when a Mulahu appeared. The men froze on their tracks—all nine of them. Then Siku began to blow into the magic whistle tied to his wrist, and the others imitated him—all of them, except Amisi and Kommanda, who lifted their rifles instead.

"But weren't you scared?" I asked Kommanda.

"Yes, Bwana," he said, "but Siku had given me the true *dawa*, years before, at the same time as he had given it to Amisi's father and his friends, in order to go and find the dead Bwana Nyekundu. I knew that the Mulahu's eyes, alone, could not kill me. Yet, I was so frightened that my finger could not pull the trigger. . . ."

A quiver shook Kommanda. For a moment he was silent.

Nor did he need to explain. I could visualize the scene for myself: the gigantic Mulahu hesitating before so many men who, surprisingly, stood their ground; the two armed hunters taking aim, but not yet capable of firing; the other seven whistling, whistling with desperate persistence. And then one of them—Siku, the sorcerer—dropping his whistle, as the unique opportunity flashed through his wicked mind. Here was the chance of his life. At one and the same time he could assuage his hatred for Amisi, take his place as Headman, get rid of Boro and make sure that I would be lost for good. Later on, he would find a way to get his own woman back. Meanwhile, his crimes would go undiscovered and unpunished, for who, after what was about to happen, would ever dare enter the Mulahu's territory again?

Kommanda spoke again.

"Suddenly," he said, "Siku's voice shrieked from behind me. He cried to the men that they were still alive only because they *thought* he had given them the true *dawa*. But he had not. He had given them only the burned excrements of a goat, powdered roots of no value, a liquid brewed from powerless leaves. He swore to this with the most solemn oath. Instantly, the men believed him. They gasped and, at once, they crumpled up, fell to the ground!"

Before Kommandanda realized that he could have saved them by shooting the Mulahu, they were dead—all of them. Before he could grasp the fact that Siku could not allow him to survive, a blade flashed. He leaped to one side, and the knife, meant for his heart, bit into his arm. He grappled with the frenzied sorcerer. They both fell. Kommandanda's rifle—my own—went off. A spurt of blood blinded him. Then he heard the roar of the approaching Mulahu, and had to freeze, to feign death.

By the time the Mulahu had gone and he dared move again, he was too weak to crawl from under Siku's body. All he could do was to fire once more—through Siku—to answer my distant shots of extreme distress.

"Tomorrow," he concluded, "before we go, I will bring you, Bwana, to where the Mulahu's footprints are imprinted, deep and clear in the mud. I will also show you the other men who died."

The following morning, before we started for our clearing, he kept both promises. As we were bending over the footprints to select the best one, an unusual, distant noise surprised me.

"Ndege," said Kommandanda without interest, without even looking up.

And so it was that, by the irony of fate, the weekly scheduled plane flew high above that clearing, utterly unaware of the ten human specks which dotted it. Two were crouching to get a good plaster-of-Paris impression of one footprint of an officially still unknown monster, the fifth anthropoid (or, at least, a greater giant gorilla of an undiscovered race) which couldn't have gone very far from that open space it had only yesterday filled with horror.

One was a pitiful, shattered corpse grotesquely wrapped in a torn, blood-soaked, absurdly large overcoat. Seven were the unfor-

gettable bodies lying stiffly in the grass in the very spots where the gigantic killer had struck them. Just with his murderous glance—without even touching them.

Swollen. Purple. The helpless victims of that strange "certain, horrible death" in which they had believed too blindly, and against which they had warned me so many times.

PART TWO

THE SANGOMA

THE AFRICA THAT IS

TYING UP SOME LOOSE ENDS

HERE I would like to skip a whole continent as well as a third of a century, and attempt to report a conversation which took place last winter in the beautiful city of Zurich. I was trying to explain *The Sangoma* to the editor of one of my publishers—one of the best in the world.

"This Witchdoctor of Snakes", I said, "is an almost incredible man. I have watched him as he performed feats which I was tempted to call miracles. This man tackled, among many others, a problem of mine for which I would have sworn there was no solution. Yet, as I'll tell you later, he tackled it successfully—quickly and easily too, as is his way.

"Here is an example of what he can do. One dark night he set out, naked except for a small loin-cloth, and not even armed with a stick. I saw him plunge into a thicket of dreadfully thorny vegetation, and emerge a few minutes later holding a freshly captured cobra in each hand; which was just what I had asked him to do—simply to put his words to the test, since they seemed to me incredible. He held the snakes between his forefinger and thumb, just under their heads. The creatures were hissing, while their four-foot bodies curled and uncurled themselves around his arms. When, from a prudent distance, I asked the Sangoma if he had already managed to empty the cobras' sacs of deadly venom (in which case they wouldn't want to strike but only to retreat), he simply shook his head, smiled, extended his arms in front of him, and allowed the snakes' heads to escape from the pressure of his fingers. Instantly, both creatures twisted round and, like flashes of lightning, struck his forearms, first with one pair of fangs, then with their spare one. And . . ."

"Excuse me for interrupting", said the editor. "But, before coming on to this fascinating man, I would like to ask you a question which has been on my mind for quite a time. The Mulahu certainly makes an engrossing story, but—is what you have written about it *all* actually true?"

This reminded me of what another good friend of mine had said to me just a few days before, in Lugano. "How is it possible that, in this day and age, when we are already uncovering the secrets of the moon, we haven't yet explored, completely, the equatorial jungle of Africa—at least not well enough to discover anything definite or final about this Mulahu?"

This made me realize that some readers, too, might ask themselves similar questions, and a few might possibly even write to me, expressing, more or less the same doubts. So I thought that I would set down here and now, some of the well-considered answers I gave, in more or less the words I use here, to these friends of mine.

"For one thing, keep in mind how many many billions of roubles, dollars, pounds sterling and marks, have been sunk in research of all kinds, in recent years—research which has taken place in gigantic plants, with fantastic apparatus, under the direction of vast numbers of the world's most brilliant brains—just to put those few missiles into orbit and to have one smack at the moon. But—who cares about exploring the innermost sections of the African equatorial jungle? Who, but I, with the shoe-string means I had at my disposal at the time, has ever made a serious effort to track down the Mulahu? Although I have always made it my business to keep up with every bit of news from Africa, I have never heard of a single person trying to go a step further in this quest.

"As for myself," I told my friends, "I can assure you that, to the best of my knowledge, there isn't one word of exaggeration or speculation—let alone of invention—in my entire report. When I finally got around to writing about it, I checked and re-checked my logs, notes and sketches; I re-read a dozen times what little correspondence I still had in my possession, from that time; I wrote and re-wrote almost every sentence, worrying and sweating over every blessed word. For I knew in advance that there would be people who had a strong tendency to disbelieve anything which

could not be overwhelmingly proved. Therefore I had to be twice as careful and exact as I would be in recounting any other, less startling adventure."

I remember my Lugano friend scratching his head. "Yet, even in perfect good faith, couldn't it have been just a feverish nightmare, which you dreamed that night when you were alone in Mulahu territory—even if you didn't realize it was a nightmare and came to think, in perfect good faith, that it was the actual truth?"

"Certainly. Don't think that this thought has never occurred to me. But don't forget, either, all the events which preceded and followed that night. Above all, keep in mind the death of those seven men, about whom the *Administrateur Territorial* officially inquired in his letter—the letter which I have included in the book. What other creature, human, quasi-human, or animal—except the Mulahu—could have killed five of them *in that way*?

"Also the reason that you do not share my firm belief, may be lack of overwhelming positive evidence, let's say. But, what is 'overwhelming positive evidence'? Are you in possession of any actual tangible proof on the subject of Sputniks, missiles in orbit or Luniks on the moon? Have you seen them with your own eyes? You believe implicitly in these facts only because you have read so much in the papers about them, because you have seen some fuzzy, distorted pictures transmitted by these missiles and things, and because you have heard about them persistently on radio and TV. But, have you ever thought of the millions and millions of people in this world who can't read, who see no papers and magazines, who don't even know what radio or TV are? Try to explain these 'facts' to them—and they will laugh at you; they will think that you are pulling their leg or taking them for suckers.

"Now, let's return to the equatorial jungle of the Congo, particularly to its most hidden, dreaded, uninhabited, taboo, central portions. Hundreds of millions of the earth's inhabitants have never even heard of this distant, still secret region. Millions more (better educated people) have read articles and books, and seen pictures and films of it—some true, some highly exaggerated, some sheer bunk. Unknown thousands of people have actually soared, on scheduled flights, above those very portions of the jungle. Leaving aside

civilians—white and black—think of the endless groups of United Nations officials and troops who have flown, back and forth, all over the Congo in this last year or so. But what have any of them seen of the equatorial jungle—except the sea of high vegetation and the dot of a clearing, here and there? In fact, they know less about this mysterious zone than if they had watched a second-class, even a fake, film about it.

"As for actually exploring it—how many people do you think have really bothered to plunge deep into that confounded country, to bury themselves there for years, nosing around, searching indefatigably, devoting themselves with unquenchable passion to solving its most jealously guarded secrets? Believe me, I know all these people. And I can count them on the fingers of *one hand*—including my wife and myself."

My friend was still "butting". "But, what about the Africans? You tell us of entire tribes, not only convinced of the Mulahu's existence, but so scared that they didn't even dare to mention the Mulahu or allow it to be named in their presence. I understand this being true then; but it was many years ago, when they were still primitive, steeped in superstition and seldom in contact with the white man. All this has changed. Countless Africans have received an education. Most tribesmen have progressed so far that they have been granted the right to vote. They have formed active political parties. Many are elected councillors, commissioners, deputies and so on. In the Congo, they were strong enough to demand, and get, independence from Belgium—not in the near future, but last year, in 1960. It is true that, ever since, there has been chaos there: looting, cruelty, massacres. But wouldn't these educated, progressive Africans laugh at the superstitions of their ignorant fathers? Before the country got into such a turmoil, wouldn't some of them have gone forward, on their own initiative to solve, one way or another, this mystery of the Mulahu. . . .?"

"Sorry," I had to say, "you are being very naïve. There are political parties, yes—some eighty of them in the Congo alone, a number which should be enough to tell you what a mixture of confusion and immaturity almost every one of them is. There are college graduates—about fifteen of them, out of fifteen million

Congolese. There are governments—but too many of them, and all too absorbed in recklessly fighting each other, and the UN, and the USA; while at the same time desperately striving to squeeze anything they can out of everybody in sight, just to keep themselves going. Don't you read the papers?"

"Of course, I do . . ."

"Well, then, can you tell me one, I repeat *one*, constructive thing, any of these parties or of these politicians has accomplished in more than a year? Much that is destructive yes; in fact, there have been many—far too many—cruel and barbarous crimes—murder and massacre, raping, beating, looting, the burning down of houses, the chasing of hundreds of thousands of their own black brothers into misery and starvation. . . . And where do these 'educated' Congolese, and the hordes of their followers operate? Essentially in and near the large concentrations of big cities, towns, mines—Leopoldville, Elizabethville, Stanleyville, Bukavu, Lulua-bourg; the coal, tin and copper mines in Kasai and Katanga—those are the names you see in the papers every day.

"And what are they after? Power and all that goes with it: prestige, comfort, good houses, clothes, liquor, cars, bodyguards, for themselves; luxuries and jewels and servants for their women. In a way, it's human. And maybe some of them even worry about a good country and a better future for their children. But if you think that these deputies, senators, premiers and presidents-to-be are going to waste time, energy and health, slogging and suffering through the evergreen equatorial jungle, to ascertain the existence of one—or of one hundred—unknown animals, you have another think coming.

"Sorry, this sounds like a sermon. But not for nothing have I spent a dozen years in the Congo. What is happening there breaks our heart. It is inconceivable to us how it was allowed to take place, when anybody with any African experience could foresee it so easily.

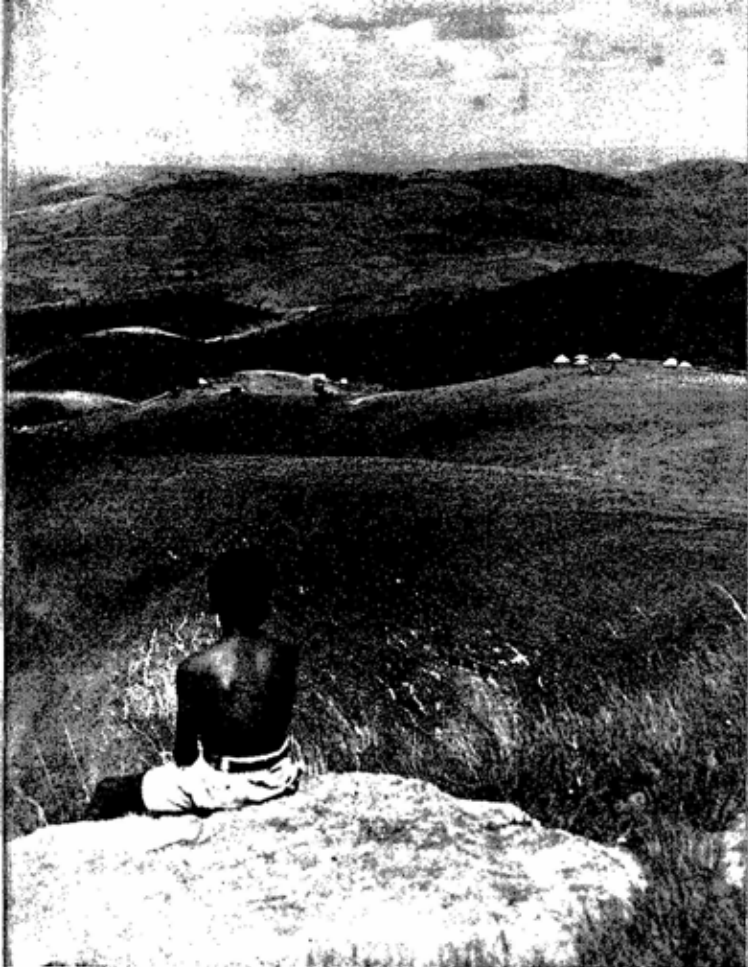
"As for the small tribes scattered at the edges of the equatorial jungle, *they* are the ones who know something about the Mulahu. Yesterday, they may have learned more or less how to vote. Today, they are desperately striving to keep body and soul to-

gether, and to escape the roaming bands of armed terrorists and ex-soldiers gone berserk. Tomorrow, if and when order is re-established, they might start pulling together, to make a going proposition of what some leaders want to call the *Union des Républiques du Congo*. But I doubt it. It is more likely that they will begin all over again—fighting against each other—clan against clan, tribe against tribe, race against race. Look at what has happened in Ruanda, between the Wahutu and the Watussi, to say nothing of the Batwa pygmies who are still as bloodthirsty as they were in the Stone Age; and in the Kasai, between the Balubas and the Lulus, and in the newly-free French Cameroons, where in six months, at least twenty-two Europeans and five hundred Africans have been killed. No, it will take a long time before voting, progress, and what we call independence (which Africans haven't as yet learned how to pronounce) begin to have some effect on the deeply-ingrained superstitions, the age-long hatreds, the inborn cruelty of the African millions.

"Let me give you a little example, which has to do with the Mulahu. With the frightening illiteracy of the Africans (even in the Congo, where the Belgians did encourage more secondary education than elsewhere), ballots for elections had to be identified by the picture of an animal. One party used a lion as an emblem, others a giraffe, a cock, a cow or an elephant. Well, one party in the Kivu's Ituri decided that it would be smart to select the giant gorilla, as it is the symbol of great strength. But the drawing was amateurish, and the animal looked more like the general notion of the Mulahu than a giant gorilla. Results? The leaders were murdered, all the ballots were destroyed and the entire party was wiped out—almost overnight, too."

"In conclusion," said my friend, "you are convinced that the Mulahu, and perhaps many other strange creatures, are still roaming little explored parts of this world—without being definitely, unequivocally, known to science?"

"Absolutely. Not only that, but I'm convinced that sometime in the future, when it is again safe to venture into the Congo, by chance or by purpose somebody will succeed in bringing back—for one—the Mulahu. Not 'alive'. of course, unless, perhaps, a



A view of Zululand from the Gatti camp.



The author (*left*) in the hut of Chief Biyela.

"Sourpuss", his face white from plaster of Paris, gives an enthusiastic report of his healing.



very young specimen is captured; but some white man (not an African, I assure you) will shoot an adult, and return with its skin or its skeleton. And so, probably, many other strange, 'impossible' creatures will yet be revealed to us—long before we find out if there is any kind of life somewhere else in the universe. Am I going on too long? Are you bored?"

"Yes, and no. You are, but I'm not—bored, I mean."

"Okay, then, I'll get it all off my chest. Hell, look—You know squids. What would you say, if you were told that some of them are 50-60 feet long? Yet, more than one such gigantic specimen has been found in the stomach of recently-killed sperm whales. There will be a time when man will manage to dive to the great depths where those mammoth squids live—and probably discover other incredible creatures down there; maybe even some kind of sea serpent, such as those that every year, in the dead season, are used to fill up news space in the newspapers. And consider the *pyrgula*, *aethiria* and *paludina*, molluscs which have been 'extinct' for aeons and, just recently, have been discovered some 300 miles south of Addis Ababa, perfectly alive and kicking. Or consider the Coelacanth, which lived millions of years ago: a fish long since extinct (everybody swore), and known, only from fossils, as a link in the chain of evolution. Yet, a specimen was caught off Africa in 1952, and another near Tananarive, in Madagascar, only a few months ago. Prehistoric, extinct, etc.,—yet both specimens were perfectly alive.

"Sorry to insist. But, think of the pygmy chimpanzee, the pygmy hippo of West Africa, the giant panda and the Komodo Dragon. Until a few years ago all of them were considered merely legendary. Think of the okapi, unheard of until the turn of the century, and of which we, ourselves, discovered a new race only a few years ago.

"And what about the Abominable Snowman, or yeti, of the Himalayas? The saga of the yeti's 'scalp' had a sad end, it is true, but Sir Edmund Hillary was still convinced of its existence. According to his reports, only a few years ago a Sherpa guide handed him a handful of coarse yeti hair, and then, frightened, snatched it away from his hands and tossed it over a sheer precipice. An American expedition, sponsored among others by Tom Slick, an oil million-

aire from Texas, has just been compelled to suspend operations in Nepal, while it waits for a more propitious season to continue its quest. These men, too, are convinced that the yeti exists. And, note this. Just as in the case of the Mulahu, the Sherpas of Nepal swear to it that the yeti goes loping through the snow in the night, *'with his hair over his eyes'* and that *'anyone who looks on him will die an instant, violent death'*."

My friend was not one to give up easily: "Well, since you are so sure, why don't you go back, with the most modern means obtainable, including a helicopter, say, and some scientists. Definitely proved, a discovery of this kind would be sensational." *

"Listen! the Congo is not one of the healthiest places today, but I would chance it. I am too old for that tough life in the jungle, but I wouldn't let even that stop me—if you would only produce, or drum up for me, the necessary funds: Not billions, you know, not even millions; just a couple of hundred thousand dollars. Then you would share in the glory. . . ."

My friend could have spared that sum without very much effort. But, with a vague smile (and with even less effort), he interrupted me.

"However," he said, "to return to the Sangoma. Let's go back to him, shall we?"

* As this book goes to press, it is reported that Swiss-born Dr. Charles Cordier, one of the world's leading naturalists, left East Africa for the Kiru jungle "to search for a species of prehistoric apeman, about the existence of which he has much evidence". To me, that's the Mulahu. To Dr. Cordier, my most heartfelt wishes of complete success.

BAD BEGINNINGS IN ZULULAND

I MET the Sangoma only a few short years ago. It would be more correct to say that I unearthed him, after a patient quest which lasted several months. Even then, I discovered him only thanks to the invaluable assistance of H. C. Lugg (a wonderful gentleman), the freshly retired Chief Native Commissioner of Zululand and the most respected living authority on Zulu history, language, customs and anything else pertaining to this proud race.

What I was doing in Zululand, what I so badly wanted with a Witchdoctor of Snakes and why it was so difficult to locate him, are questions best answered by part of the tape-recording I made of a conversation, which took place at the beginning of the 12th Gatti African Expedition—one of a succession of large undertakings which have kept me from returning to the equatorial jungle and to the home of the Mulahu.

Ellen and I were giving a little party to celebrate the completion of our base camp, the substantial village we had rigged-up on the top of a rounded, eucalyptus-crowned hill in what could rightly be called the heart of Zululand. With us were Dr. Theodore Bliss, our physician for many years and one of our dearest friends; Mr. Lugg; Professor Molland of Eshowe, Zululand's diminutive capital, and some more of the nice people I had met on a previous visit to that part of Africa as much as thirty-four years before.

Of course, thirty-four years is a long gap to bridge. First of all, my friends wanted to know what I had done for all those years, apart from what little they had learned from books, articles and not-too-frequent letters of mine. Inevitably, also, the Mulahu came up in the conversation. Being old hands in Africa, our South African guests didn't find anything extraordinary in the story I briefly sketched

out for them. What seemed to startle Professor Molland, instead, was the onslaught of blackwater fever which had smitten me with a dreadful impact, the moment that Kommanda had half-guided, half-carried me to *Tzamboho*, our "Beautiful Clearing".

"I'll be blown," said the Professor. "I've been a physician in this devilish country for almost half a century, but I have never seen, heard of, or read about, a single case of a man surviving a second attack of blackwater fever; not even when experienced doctors, good hospitals, and all necessary medicines were to hand."

"Still, I am here, aren't I? It is true that the second time it took me an eternity to pull up and get back on my legs again; but, after all, you said only a while ago that I looked healthier than you have ever seen me."

"Yes, I did. But I should like to know who fixed you up, and how—in a deserted clearing buried in the middle of the equatorial jungle? Don't tell me that, providentially, you met a doctor there—nor that your boy, Kommanda, healed you . . . with some atrocious medicament made out of excrements and what not."

"Don't look at her, because she will deny it. But what saved me was Ellen—her love, her fantastic self-sacrifice, her nursing me day and night, without a moment's rest or even a bite of food. How she managed to keep me alive, I, frankly, don't know. But her devotion accomplished more than any hospital could have done. After those dreadful ten or twelve days, a real physician entered the scene, a Doctor Moll, who came the long distance from Beni (the New Beni, of course), to pull me out of it. But Kommanda deserves plenty of credit, too. It was he who, weak and exhausted as he was, went off, the minute he had delivered me to Ellen, to look for our cook and boys, to round them up, and to herd them back to *Tzamboho*. Without them—without the devoted care with which they made up for their desertion—I couldn't have survived; and nor could Ellen have survived either. And I mustn't forget Monsieur Capron, the Irumu Postmaster. . . ."

"A Postmaster? What had he to do with all this?"

"He and his wife were close friends of ours, two of those friends who you are very lucky if you find a couple of times in your life. He got more and more worried, as our mail accumulated in his

office and weeks passed without his hearing from us. One day he pinned down his good old *planton*, and the African reluctantly told him of the rumours concerning my disappearance and the death of many of my men. That same afternoon, his wife gathered some provisions, he closed the office a little earlier than usual, and both of them hitch-hiked to the beginning of our path on the Irumu-Beni road. Then, armed with an old blunderbuss that he could never have used anyway, and with, as his only light, a resin torch carried ahead by the *planton*, they marched for endless hours through the eerie, jungle night, which invisible prowlers filled with mysterious, creeping, frightening sounds.

"The Caprons never forgot that night. Far less did they forget what they found when they finally reached our clearing. Ellen was emaciated, starved, barely able to stand. Mrs. Capron practically forced her to swallow some of the food she had brought, and to go to bed for a few hours, on the promise that she and her husband would look after me every second of that time. As for me, Capron soothed the wild delirium in which I, apparently, was at the moment. He had the boys change my soaked sheets, and made me drink some juice of the oranges he had thoughtfully brought with him. When, recovering consciousness, I asked him what he was doing there, Mr. Capron simply answered that he had dropped in to bring us our mail. He pointed at the big pile he had deposited on the table, without mentioning that he had slipped, beneath all the others, a letter from the Irumu Territorial Administrator, which he imagined would only bring me worry. That, as I discovered weeks later while convalescing, was the letter inquiring about Amisi and the other dead men.

"I feebly asked if there were many bills. Mr. Capron said that he 'had taken the liberty' of leaving behind all envelopes which looked as if they contained this sort of thing. He (who certainly wasn't a rich man) was going to pay them at once, on my behalf, and I could repay him whenever convenient, when I had entirely recovered. And," I smiled at Professor Molland, "that wasn't all the treatment I got from the Irumu postmaster, either. I do not know how much I said in my delirium, but Mr. Capron knew that something was troubling me much more deeply than all the bills in the world—

the fear that the Mulahu hair and footprint cast might get lost or spoiled. He opened the metal box in which those things were locked, wrapped the contents up as delicately as if they have been crown jewels, and promised to send them at once by registered, insured mail to England to a friend of mine, the great naturalist Lord Rothschild. Before the Caprons left, Ellen, revived by those few hours (her first) of real rest, took over her nursing again. And two days later, alerted by the Caprons, that angel, Dr. Moll, came to do his stuff. So, as you see, I'm still around, in damned good health, and working as hard as ever. And now, who wants another drink?"

Everybody did. While the professor was still slowly shaking his head, a Mr. Williams, now a prosperous real-estate agent, reminded me of the little, old dilapidated Ford that he, as a small garage owner, had sold me thirty-four years before for something like £15. "That was the only vehicle your expedition had, then. In fact, I remember your telling me that it was the first car (if it could be called a car) that you had used in Africa. And now—look at this!"

From where we sat, between Ellen's trailer-coach and my own, "this" made quite an imposing sight. Two bigger, specially-conceived and designed trailer-coaches for the crew. One Rolling Roomette—a special truck, containing twin beds, a fully-equipped bathroom, refrigerator, electric lights, fans, etc.—for occasional trips across open country. Five four-wheel-drive jeeps, for towing the trailers from base camp to base camp, and for action in the field for the rest of the time. Three passenger cars. Three huge trucks—one of them containing four electric generating plants, ranging from 5,000 to 25,000 watts. A whole platoon of tents of all kinds, sizes and shapes. Five aluminium boats, each with an outboard motor. Camouflaged water-cycles for photographic work on lakes and rivers . . . And everywhere the orderly disorder created by a dozen white technicians and a score of uniformed Africans, all hard at work.

"And what's this for?" asked another of my old friends, pointing at a mike standing between the rapidly emptying bottles and plates of canapés.

"It's connected with that sound recorder, there. We use it all the

time, instead of the old-fashioned log, which took so long to keep up to date, even if we only kept it sketchily. In this way, instead, if I want, for example, to refer to this conversation years from now, all I will have to do is play back the tape."

"You have become too modern, too mechanized and just—plain lazy."

"Lazy, my foot! Think how much work and thought and preparation it takes to arrange an expedition like this. And, wait for a day or two, until you can watch it humming really busily. Then you will see that, because of all these means at our disposal, we can, by slaving hard, accomplish in a couple of months the same amount of work which before would have taken at least a year."

"What's your programme this time?"

"A big theatrical feature-film, two educational shorts and six commercial films, all in colour, of course, and with the usual addition of thousands of stills in colour, white, infra-red, stereo-colour, and so on. We start as soon as Mr. Lugg produces the goods."

Mr. Lugg, who had kindly agreed to act as our technical adviser, general assistant, public relations man and a few other things, didn't believe in beating about the bush. "What d'you want?"

We needed the hell of a lot—for the educational and commercial films and, even more, for our most important task, the big motion-picture which Ellen and I had long dreamed of. We wanted to bring our African life to a climax, with a full-sized feature film, based on an honest (yet dramatic) African story, shot entirely in Africa, and performed exclusively by Africans. It was not to be just another travelogue or documentary, but a real drama with all the action, intrigue, suspense and excitement necessary to make it a popular success. Yet, at the same time, it had to be a scrupulously authentic record, which would perpetuate the most striking aspects of Zulu life—of their witchcrafts, superstitions and customs—before they were dulled, forgotten, erased for ever by the all-equalizing greyness of civilization.

"As I have already told you," said Mr. Lugg, "you haven't come a day too soon. In fact, it may already be too late."

From the 1700-foot elevation of our camp, I could see most of Zululand—an immense expanse of gently-rolling green hills

dreamily stretching for some twenty miles, and getting lower and lower until they blended with the misty blueness of the Indian Ocean. Far to the right and to the left, were the greener ribbons of Natal's great sugar plantations. In between, was the tremendously vast Reserve where the Zulus are still free to live their unhampered, unhurried, uninhibited life.

Scattered here and there were groups of tiny dots, arranged around a pencil-thin circle: this last was the empty cattle enclosure, surrounded by the round huts of a kraal—a family's small village. There the head of the family, poor, ignorant, superstitious as he might be, was accustomed to be a king in his own castle, fiercely independent, doing exactly what he wanted, and responsible only to the Chief of his tribe. Near each kraal, mealie-meal patches looked like miniature yellow postage stamps; slowly moving pinpoints were the cattle—a kraal's only wealth, and the Zulu's greatest pride—which were out at pasture.

From where we sat, except for the unexpectedly enormous increase of the sugar plantations, it appeared to be exactly the same country in which, so many years before, I had encountered the exciting adventures which I have described in *Tom-Tom*, *South of the Sahara* and *Killers All*. It was our greatest ambition to re-create these very adventures, altering them only enough to string them together in the sustained continuity necessary for a theatrical picture, and to photograph them in today's gorgeous colour, so as to make "Bitter Spears", a unique film which we knew in advance would cost us blood, but which we were sure would appeal to the audiences of the world.

"First," I told Mr. Lugg, "we need to find two or three really typical, traditional kraals, to be used as stages. They must all be in very sunny places, so as to permit as many hours of work each day as possible—with the sun behind the camera, as is necessary for good colour. In the end, one of these kraals will have to be burned down completely, for the picture's final sequence."

Mr. Lugg raised his heavy eyebrows. "I'm afraid most kraals today are dilapidated, shabby, unkempt. Instead of huts, you will find shacks—with corrugated iron roofs in lieu of the beautiful old thatch, and with rough, wooden doors replacing the colourful

skins. Very few kraals get sun for more than an hour or so a day. I know of only one which is kept beautifully and according to tradition; and, by chance, it is in a sunny position, too. But Sashelo, its owner, has spent most of his adult life on it. He wouldn't let you burn it down for all the gold in Zululand."

That wasn't exactly encouraging. "We will need several hundred warriors, married women and virgins—all of them absolutely correctly clothed, or unclothed, and with the right coiffures, head-dresses, bead-work, weapons, musical instruments, and so on. To make sure that they don't disappear in the middle of the work, I thought we should pay them an absolute minimum every week, then a really good *banzela* at the end of the production. . . ."

Mr. Lugg brushed his forehead and eyes with a discouraged hand. "There are no more warriors such as you used to know. All able-bodied men, now, go to work for three months every year in the sugar plantations in order to be able to do nothing for the remaining nine months—and to buy the most dreadful, violently-coloured caps, shirts, trousers, shoes and socks from the small Indian stores. As for their tribal regalia, their weapons and shields, tools and instruments, they have sold the best ones to tourists, and let the balance go to rack and ruin. Most married women have got too lazy to keep up with their huge, traditional coiffures; they just wear some dirty kind of scarf around their heads. As for virgins . . ." Mr. Lugg, even more sceptically, again shrugged his shoulders.

There I was, with that huge expedition, all set to start on that big film. Mr. Lugg must be exaggerating, I thought; and I was accustomed to overcoming difficulties. The important thing was not to lose heart, even if the sad head-shaking of our other guests was not exactly cheering. "We also need an imposing forceful, arrogant-looking chief of Royal blood," I said. "What about my old friend Xipooso?"

"A hopeless drunkard, by now. Nobody pays any attention to him any more. Of his lively harem of beautiful young wives, only two old hags remain. He has no more daughters to give in marriage, only a few head of scrawny cattle, and a miserable slum of a kraal that would make you sick."

Well, well. "But has everything changed, gone completely to pot, then—just in these, relatively few, years?"

"Not quite everything, but almost. There are still two very good chiefs. Here and there, we might yet discover some individuals—men, married women or girls—who still have some respect for tradition, who still stick to the old customs of this once proud race. Only one thing will you find not changed—and that's superstition. Of that you will find as much as ever. We shall run smack against it, every move we make. We shall have to be very careful and diplomatic, if we are to avoid being stumped by it all the time. The Zulu has changed in a hundred ways. But he is still his own ignorantly superstitious, irresponsibly inflammable self, as he has been for centuries."

"What about Twadekili, the great Pythoness I knew so well? I suppose she is dead by now. But wouldn't Ramini, her pupil, do? Or another Pythoness? One of the main characters of our story is a Sangoma—male or female, it doesn't matter; but he, or she, has to be a very good Witchdoctor of Snakes, indeed."

"I hate to be so disappointing, but Twadekili is dead. Her pupil died even before she did. What is worse, the whole profession has practically disappeared. I haven't seen a real Sangoma, of either sex, for at least ten or twelve years. I vaguely remember hearing of one, a few years ago, but he was a man of a distant clan. I never knew how serious he was. Nor do I know whether he is still alive or, if he is, whether he would be willing to come here to work for you."

For a beginning, this couldn't have been more chilling. I saw Ellen's big brown eyes watching me, enormous with worry. I winked and nodded at her, trying not to look frightened. In fact, being a dreadful optimist by nature, I actually felt the dawning of a few ideas in my mind. After all, problems were the salt of life, and I felt that, one by one, we would somehow manage to solve them all. As for the Witchdoctor of Snakes, there simply *had* to be at least one left. In that case we must find him—or her, and if this Witchdoctor was unwilling to come to us, we would go to her—or him. . . .

"Well, here's to your getting your Sangoma," said the professor, standing up to go, and lifting his almost empty glass. "If you and Lugg cannot get him, nobody else ever will."

ZULU HOLLYWOOD

EXCITING, engrossing as the making of a number of African films may be (and is) to the men who are, in one way or another, responsible for their production—a day-by-day account of it is something that I wouldn't dare to inflict upon the reader. But it is my belief that those months of continuous, close contact with the same hundreds of Zulus of both sexes, of various walks of life and of all ages; the endless series of unusual problems to be solved, of strange difficulties to be overcome, of superstitions to be appeased, circumvented or somehow counteracted—gave us a unique opportunity of glimpsing facets of the true character and habits of the Zulus of today. By long experience, I am sure that we would have seen, observed, learned much less if we had been in the country for the same amount of time, or longer, under the solemn, and at once suspicious, guise of anthropologists, ethnographers and what-not.

As it was, there we were, a group of crazy, rushed Merikani (and who, even in Zululand, doesn't know that most Americans are a bit cracked and always in a hurry?), perennially working ourselves to the bone, and sweating enough to make any self-respecting Zulu tired only with looking at us. Yet there we were, too, shelling out a continuous stream of shillings, masses of good food and cigarettes and heavily-sugared tea, almost to any Zulu in sight. And what for? For a man to dress up in that funny, old-fashioned regalia, to sit and talk, to dance and sing. For his wives and daughters to cover their breasts when these were too elegantly pendulous (and therefore exposed), or to uncover them when they were unfashionably firm, round, hard-pointed (and therefore hidden). For his children to drive his cattle from here to there, then back

again from there to here. For all of them to do the same foolish things over and over again, then to be rushed off in our big trucks from one place to another, only to start all over again the same nonsense—which bore no relation whatever to the real life, lower-paid labour of cutting and carrying huge piles of sugar cane.

This unusual, mostly incomprehensible, but always friendly atmosphere, made for relaxation, for a certain amount of familiarity, for at least a partial letting-down of the customary barriers. From it emerged a certain number of vignettes and episodes which must be especially appealing to anyone interested in Africa. I would like to recount some of them briefly just as they came our way while we were waiting to get hold of the Sangoma who was to play such an important role in our main film, as well as in my own life—a Sangoma who, as I will soon explain, was not only notable in himself, but even more remarkable because he was to turn out to be in all probability, the last true Witchdoctor of Snakes, Snake Charmer, and general Medicine Man in all Zululand.



At a surprisingly short distance from the seemingly complete isolation of our camp, was Eshowe, the capital of Zululand. When I had last seen it, it had consisted of a sleepy village of a dozen widely scattered wooden buildings. Now it had grown into a sprawling, but compact, town, bustling with activity, traffic and noise, and with large pavements which were crowded with hundreds of people of almost all races and colours.

Only the characteristic, steepled Town Hall had not changed. There, Mr. Lugg, who knew not only every Zulu and everything Zulu but also everything and everybody else, began to take me from office to office and to do his stuff. Whenever his influence and prestige seemed to need some form of reinforcement, a magical word supplied it—"Bioscope". That's what both whites and blacks still call motion-pictures in South Africa. And there, as everywhere else, film-making exercised a universal appeal, which became irresistible when connected with the Stars and Stripes on our vehicles. Bioscope meant glamour. Merikani instantly suggested great quantities of *malini*, to be spent locally; for Americans and

money, as everybody thinks, go together—and neither seemed to be unwelcome in Eshowe,

The same Town Clerk who had given me permission to occupy our camp site, now suggested our using also a huge nearby structure, which the Y.M.C.A. had donated, during World War 2, as an entertainment centre for the military training camp which had been, originally, responsible for the clearing and the flattening-out of our hilltop. The decaying building was now in the hands of the much respected, well behaved, industrious coloured community of Eshowe; but, perhaps, if they were not aiming to have a dance soon, they wouldn't mind letting us use it. Luckily no dances were planned for the immediate future. And Mr. Apollos, the Chairman of the Coloureds, was enchanted at the idea that we might use his hall as a bioscope studio, but doubtful whether it would serve the purpose, because of its incredible number of windows, mostly broken. But, as soon as I told him that we should cover them all with heavy paper anyway, the hall was ours, for a most reasonable fee.

With Mr. Lugg's prodding, the Post Office promptly revived the camp's long abandoned telephone circuit; the Public Works agreed to lay a pipe from a nearby reservoir, to give us all the water we wanted—enough for the whole camp and for our trailer photocine laboratories. The School Principal suggested a man to buttress my shaky Zulu—Dube, a reliable mission-educated native who spoke fluent English. The Clerk of the Court despatched some messengers to locate the Sangoma mentioned by Mr. Lugg, others to alert Biyela and Begeshowe, both of royal blood, and the most important, best-obeyed chiefs in Zululand—as well as being the only ones who could still produce enough warriors, women, girls and children to give me a chance to select our leading stars, supporting actors and bit players, not to mention plenty of extras for crowd scenes.

When Mr. Lugg took me to see them at their huge kraals, I found that Begeshowe was trim, handsome, evidently capable and efficient. He said he was willing to do all he could for us, and he meant it. Biyela was tremendously fat, but he too had an air of unmistakable authority. Cast him as our script's Royal Chief—

and no audience would mistake his big, Buddah-like bulk. An important consideration to be kept in mind throughout our casting, because we had to avoid the "All Chinese look alike to me" kind of risk, as African natives, too, are easily confused with each other by people not well acquainted with them. When we asked Biyela if he would also do some work for the bioscope, he laughed until he choked. He didn't have the slightest idea what we meant. But he had no trouble in understanding the sum I was offering to pay him. In fact, he accepted at once, most eagerly.

The trouble was that, except for some old men, the warriors of both chiefs were away, earning *malini* in the sugar plantations, and wouldn't return for some weeks. This meant the complete disruption of our original schedules. In order not to lose many days of certain good weather, we switched everything around. Instead of first getting the stars, I began by casting the "heavies". For one of them, I selected Twabeni, a headman of Biyela and the tallest man in circulation at the moment, to portray our script's vicious, power-hungry Medicine Man who, under the guise of medically treating his Royal Chief, slowly poisons him. For the other, I got Sashelo, a splendidly built warrior easily recognizable by his copper-coloured skin, his arrogant moustaches and the pointed horn which stuck out from his gorgeous head-dress, to play the part of Twabeni's brother and accomplice. Sashelo, with a perfectly straight face, agreed to "try" his best also to fill, properly, the main part of his role, that of "Sorcerer of Smell"—that is to say the witchdoctor who (supposedly only in ancient times), took matters into his own hands whenever serious crimes had been committed and the murderer had gone undiscovered. He would then gather the tribe's warriors in a great circle, work himself up into a sort of leaping hysteria, and jump right and left, sniffing at one warrior after the other. Finally he would grab one, claiming that "the smell of fear" had revealed the man as the guilty one. What Sashelo didn't know, and I never mentioned, was that Mr. Lugg had told me that Sashelo had twice been in trouble with the authorities, for being suspected of having secretly worked as exactly such a witchdoctor—and one of the very best of them, at that.

The snag was that this most forbidden ceremony, and many more

bioscope crimes, would have to happen in a kraal of vast proportions which, at the end of the film, the Royal Chief would order to be completely destroyed by fire. As I've said, Sashelo did own just such a kraal, a really splendid one. For a consideration, of course, he wouldn't mind, in the least, our going to work there every day, if we wanted to; but as for burning it down for our grand finale—nothing doing. As Mr. Lugg had predicted, even the idea revolted him; and no patient explanation or ultra-generous offer would make him change his mind.

The only alternative was for us to build, in some convenient spot, a kraal of our own, an exact replica of Sashelo's, as no other could offer us a better model. But we had to pick a place as near as possible to the base camp, so as to supervise its construction, and then use it without any waste of time. What was wrong with that portion of our clearing which we hadn't occupied because it was exposed to the hot sun from morning to evening? To use it would put our kraal practically in our pocket, and Mr. Lugg found it a jolly good idea. As soon as we returned to camp, he assured me, he would get hold of the best Hut-Maker in the country—an old chap who looked like nothing on earth but was a wizard at his work.

Well, it so happened that the old chap was in jail. When I finally met him, I had to agree that he certainly looked "like nothing on earth". Yet, he had been the hub of a most complicated adultery case. Condemned to a fine, and unable or unwilling to pay it, he had been sweating it out in the local jug. So, off went Mr. Lugg with 300 shillings, and back he came, the following day, with a beaming Hut-Maker. This improbable Don Juan was all set to go to work, too, as soon as he was supplied with his indispensable assistants—two powerful females, who represented the remaining angles of the rustic triangle and were therefore also in jail. As soon as they, too, were bailed out, all the Hut-Maker required was twenty male and twenty female labourers, forty cane-knives (the same things as the *pangas* made infamous a few years ago by Kenya's Mau-Maus), and a few jeeps and trucks for carting all the saplings and grass which the labourers would cut under his direction. In the meanwhile, his assistants would start braiding the miles of vegetable rope necessary

for tying the grass up in bundles, and for fastening the bundles to the arched saplings which only the Hut-Maker could properly build into each hut's beautifully curved and proportioned "skeleton".

To reproduce correctly Sashelo's kraal, there was also a small matter of 532 banana and aloe trees. These had to be found, haggled for, dug out, brought to the clearing, and stuck into as many holes, to be made in the hard packed, ex-parade ground. Nothing else was needed—except that someone must abundantly water these 532 transplanted trees twice a day for a couple of weeks, and that we had to send some of our men from far kraal to far kraal, to purchase the hundreds of props necessary to make the replica of Sashelo's home look authentic and inhabited—sleeping mats and grinding stones, beer pots and strainers, wooden platters and spoons, garments and bead-work. At the last moment, I added to the list a good number of chickens, cocks, dogs, and goats to be let loose in the new kraal at the proper times—just the final realistic touch, you know.

Apart from these insignificant details, things were beginning to move. The weather was magnificent, and we took advantage of it by shooting exteriors which required only Twabeni and Sashelo, or women and girls—who were luckily in large supply. I was elated. I felt my persistent optimism fully justified—though I should have known better. All my previous, long expeditions, all the films (of any kind) which I had made during the many years of my African life, should have impressed upon me certain facts. First, that, for some reason or other, there is no undertaking more loaded with complications than an expedition, particularly at its outset. Second, that anything—anything at all—may happen the moment actual production of a picture—any picture—starts. Third, that a combination of two such explosive elements—a huge expedition plus a big picture—was bound to spell Trouble (Trouble, with a most emphatically capital T).

Ellen fell, badly cracking her skull; and, before being discovered, she lost pints and pints of blood. Our beloved Dr. Bliss just managed to patch her up, before he himself went down with double pneumonia. Dysentery put some members of the crew *hors de combat*. Other technicians just couldn't take the pace of our work,

which was very different from what went on in their usual studio habitat. At the cost of disrupting my so carefully laid plans, these had to be sent home. Wary of unknown replacements, I just had to pile up more jobs and responsibilities on the remaining, really good men.

Of course, my burden too, was vastly increased, and my task, already tough enough, was made even tougher. To start with, the Zulu is just the reverse of an actor. Not only is he unable to reproduce a recognizable emotion, but he makes it a point of honour to keep his face as expressionless as an egg, under all circumstances. When he lets himself go to the point of showing any feeling, he reacts in ways entirely different from our own. Persuade him to be natural and express great surprise—and he will tap his left shoulder with his right hand. Beg him to make his surprise look as if it were mingled with deep sorrow—and he will start beating his palms, in a sort of slow-motion applause. Ask him, for heaven's sake, to do something convincing about displaying the deepest admiration for something or somebody—and he will repeatedly pat his own behind. Naturally these gestures, especially when coupled with the unalterable "eggy", facial non-expression, would be bound to be confusing on the screen.

That's where my extensive experience in "directing" natives of countless tribes and races came in handy—and made an acrobat out of me once again. For my job as director was not so much to explain, however patiently, what I wanted from my actors. Almost every time, in order to get anything at all out of them, I had to throw myself into the most spirited pantomimes, to actually show each individual what I expected him or her to do, or to look like. For every single scene, this had to be done over and over again, until the poor devils grasped my point, and managed to give a satisfactory imitation of my exhausting contortions.

My only consolation was in the knowledge that, by the end, their inborn grace and natural fluidity of motions would translate my awkward, often side-splittingly ridiculous acrobatics, into smooth sequences of effortlessly harmonious gestures and eloquently convincing reactions. This was so frequently true that when later, back in America, we came to cutting and editing "Bitter

Spears," anybody seeing the whole or part of the picture, would make some such exclamation as: "What splendid, *natural* actors those Zulus are!" which, of course, was most gratifying to me. Yet, that "natural" made me wince, too. Unwillingly, I recalled the script's 851 shots. With an average of three or four principal actors in each shot and with every action for each of them repeated by me anything between four and six times, it added up to some 14,890 scenes which I had had to "play". And this incredible number didn't include the additional wild gesturing necessary to demonstrate what I required from the "extras"—the baffled dozens, scores, and sometimes hundreds of them.



While the building of the big kraal in our clearing was pushed ahead as fast as humanly possible, I decided to break in some new actors with something really easy. Nothing could have been simpler than what I had in mind—to make the collection of plaster of Paris masks which I had lightly promised to an anthropologist friend of mine—and to film the operation, in order to introduce, plausibly, one of our men and myself into the beginning of the picture, so that we could handle its commentary in English.

The following day, attracted by my extravagant promise of ten shillings pay for as many minutes' work, Zulus flocked into our camp from every direction. For once, they were laughing, joking and singing. It seemed almost too good to be true.

And so it was. It soon appeared that Dube had dutifully spread the news of the money, but not mentioned the "work" I expected for it. The moment I began to explain, the festive atmosphere evaporated. I finished with one of my usual well tried, absolutely sure-fire jokes, but there wasn't a single laugh. Instead, after a few seconds of stunned silence, a warrior got up and began a violent harangue. He was tall, thin and had such a disagreeable face that when Leo Berger, our Swiss camp manager, whispered: "Listen to Sourpuss!" the name seemed so appropriate that we all adopted it at once, and it stuck.

Unfortunately, Sourpuss happened to be the custodian of the virgin Mdabuli, who, apart from being the bioscope "leading lady"

as Biyela's only daughter, was, in real life, the Chief's niece. Taking full advantage of his privileged position, this unpleasant creature haughtily lectured us on what my companions and I had come to call, for brevity, the "body-hex complex". Obviously, this superstitious belief was still as widespread and deep-rooted as it had been thirty-four years before. Every Zulu who had any sense, sermonized Sourpuss, knew what mortal dangers he would incur, were he to leave around anything which had belonged to his body—such as hair or some nail-parings, or even a garment, or any other object which had been in prolonged contact with his body. If any such item fell into the hands of an enemy, anything the enemy wished upon it would inexorably happen to the man to whom the thing had belonged. In other words, he dramatically concluded, anyone allowing the likeness of his face to be taken away from him, would be practically committing suicide!

I was licked, and I knew it; Sourpuss had won the bout. And didn't he know it! As he herded all the others away, his face was twisted by a vinegary smirk which, I took it, was his peculiar version of a victorious smile.

Dube had witnessed the whole scene without saying a word. Afterwards, I asked him if he, too, believed in such bosh. "N-no", he answered. "However, when I go to a barber, I'm careful to collect all my cut hair, then to burn it myself."

"But aren't you a Christian?"

"Certainly, sir. But nothing in my religion prohibits me from burning my own hair." Which of course might have been a specious answer, but was as good as any.

A few days later, I was still smarting from my defeat when Sourpuss came to ask if he could speak to me in private. This time, instead of a smug smirk, his face sported a badly swollen cheek. He had a terrible toothache, he complained; he couldn't sleep. Wouldn't I, please, heal him with one of the white man's miraculous medicines?

My first impulse was to tell him to go to hell. But, obviously, he was in serious pain. So, I compromised by giving his gums and the inside of his cheek a vicious swabbing with oil of cloves—enough of it to burn holes through a rhino's hide. Did he mind it? Not a bit;

in fact, he loved it. Ah! he gasped, that *was* powerful medicine. It was wonderful how it stung and burned. It had already taken away most of the pain, he said, thanking me profusely.

Mollified, I called Leo. "Listen, Sourpuss is a pest. But I know by painful experience what a bad toothache is like. Haven't we something else that could help the poor devil—a cold poultice, perhaps?"

Cold poultice? I repeated to myself. *Wait a minute!* Something along these lines had worked pretty well for me years ago. Why shouldn't it work again now?

I winked at Leo and at the head cameraman, and they got the idea at once. Hurriedly, I dismissed all the other Zulus, Dube first of all. Then I told Sourpuss to lie down on the ground and to keep his eyes tightly closed. As the cameraman nodded in readiness, Leo arrived with a water-soaked bandage, saturated with plaster of Paris. We spread it over Sourpuss's face and around the breathing tubes we stuck in his nostrils. We pressed it over his eyes, on the sides of his nose and under the chin. He never moved. He didn't even wince when the mask, hardened to a perfect shape, was pulled off. After Leo had hidden it away, I told Sourpuss to open his eyes and to get up. He was healed, said I. Strangely enough, he actually *was*. Before we could wipe his face clean, off he went, leaping, laughing, and looking like a new man.

We were still shaking our head in disbelief, when an unknown warrior timidly appeared. He had a pain in his neck, he complained—it had tortured him for days. Just now he had met Sourpuss, found out why he looked so elated, and why his face was streaked with white. If only we would treat him, too, he begged.

I thought it was worth trying. So we obliged. The iodine I painted on the sore spot might have done some good. But what good could a cold, wet bandage on his face possibly have done to his bad neck? Yet, he went away marvelling at the effects. The news spread, and for once the superstitious mentality of the Zulus, instead of hindering, helped us. Other "patients" came. One by one, we took care of them, never in front of other natives and always using, first of all, what I thought was the best medicine for each case. Every time, regardless of the complaint, or of the medication, equally brilliant results were obtained. By the time our supply of

these special bandages had given out, we had all the scenes we wanted, plus a splendid collection of masks—which were still kept carefully out of sight, of course. We also had to do a lot of talking to persuade other prospective patients that we were no longer in the doctoring business, because our stock of magic medicines was exhausted. But "The Case of the Cantankerous Custodian" was far from concluded.

SUPERSTITION WAS MY TROUBLE

BY THE time the sugar season had ended and the younger men returned, the replica of Sashelo's kraal was completed. It was a real beauty.

The Sangoma, on the other hand, was still a myth. The original messengers had returned with vague, contradictory news. Others had been sent out with stricter instructions, and the promise of a larger *banzela* in the case of success. In the meantime, after several wrong starts, we had found an elderly man to play the part of Sukumbana, the Royal Chief's *induma*, his only reliable counsellor and his trusted friend. In addition to his being an actual *induma* and a very nice old man, he couldn't be confused with anybody else in the cast because of his dignified beard and his superbly spiked mustachios.

Sukumbana was so willing, that the minute he understood what gesture I wanted from him, he went on repeating it and repeating it *ad infinitum*. In fact, it was practically impossible to make him stop. For instance, one of his first scenes consisted simply of his talking with the Chief. They were to sit comfortably together, their backs against the wall of Biyela's hut. They were free to say anything they wanted, as we were not recording this conversation. All they had to do was to confer in a natural way—first one of them talking, then the other. When everything seemed more than clear, we started grinding the cameras. Despite all our encouragements, neither opened his mouth, since each was waiting for the other to start. We re-explained and tried again. Instantly, they both began chatting away at the same time, neither paying the slightest attention to the words of the other. It took time, patience, and a lot of breath and film but, at long last, we got what we wanted.

The next step was that, after having resumed their conversation,

Sukumbana was to point once, just once, for emphasis, at his chest. After several pantomimes from me and Sukumbana's conscientious repetitions, everything seemed all right.

"O.K." I said. "Ready? Camera!"

All went well, too, this time—that is as far as the chest-pointing.

Then: "Cut," I told the head cameraman. "Good. Thanks," I smiled at the old man. "Now, talk to the Chief, but no more gestures!"

Nothing doing. Dube, the interpreter, began to giggle, then made a brave attempt to keep serious. He seconded my sketchy words with a flow of clicking language. The Chief, who was smart (especially about what others should do), grunted some quick instructions of his own. Mr. Lugg went into a lengthy dissertation. By then, Dube, the most elegantly dressed among us all, was rolling on the ground, in uncontrollable laughter; because the obliging Sukumbana smiled and heartily nodded agreement with one and all—but was still most faithfully continuing to stab at his own chest with a pointing finger, for the hundredth time, perhaps, and as regularly as a well-oiled machine. He would probably still be at it today, if we hadn't stopped him by sheer force.

When we had finally succeeded in breaking Sukumbana of this bad habit, we were ready for the younger men. Only, they weren't ready for us. They still had some *malini* left from their labour on the plantation didn't they? So, why work? Every day some of them sent word that they would come tomorrow; and nothing further happened, until they hadn't a penny left.

It was our luck that one of the first to get broke was an extremely handsome, beautifully built young warrior. Evidently, he was most popular with the girls, because numberless beaded necklaces—the Zulu girl's love letters—decorated his neck, stretching it and stiffening it, until it looked like that of a stuffed giraffe. The moment I saw him, I knew he would be just right as Siliva, our male lead. He would play the part of a youth who had nothing but real love for the Royal Chief's daughter, a hero who, through countless adventures and misadventures, would save the Chief's life and marry the Princess Mdabuli, whose hand Sashelo ("he of the horn") had vainly tried to grab by various dirty tricks.

In fact, as soon as we had persuaded Siliva (as we started calling him) to part, temporarily, with his love tokens, he ceased to look as stiff as a board, proved most intelligent, and became one of our most satisfactory actors. Our only fear lay in the complication which might develop when such a Lothario was pressed into a concentrated, even if purely bioscopic, courtship of the flirtatious Mdabuli. The minute they met, however, just the opposite of what we expected, occurred: not love, but antipathy, at first sight.

My men thought that the fault was solely hers. Some reasoned that she felt superior to Siliva because she was not only "playing" a princess, but was actually of royal blood. Others maintained that her maidenly modesty was offended by this celluloid courtship, because she was already engaged and fervently devoted to a youth who was still away, working somewhere or other. A third opinion was that she, having worked during all those months for the bioscope, resented this ignominious, who had just arrived from the distant mountains and was so nonplussed by everything he saw or by anything we asked him to do. Be that as it may, this feeling of theirs steadily increased with the passing of time—and, needless to say, did much to make our efforts even more lively and full of unexpected diversions.

Then there was The Evil Dwarf—as far as I know, the only healthy, strong and intelligent dwarf in the whole of Zululand, and, of course, another unmistakable character. Cast as the slave-like confederate of the two "villains" (Twabeni and Sashelo) he was just as nice and co-operative a fellow as either of them. But did his good nature help us? Not a bit.

Our production was now in full swing. Scenes which included the dwarf began to pile up. He had worked so well in thirty-four of them that, when he asked me for some *malini* in advance, I gave it to him without a second thought. He was most appreciative, and off he went to his brother's kraal, to celebrate, with his family, the birth of a child. Four days later, punctual as ever, there he was. But his hair wasn't. His big head was shaved to the skin, which made him look like another dwarf altogether. "But," he answered my protestations, quite baffled. "It wasn't only one child. There were two of them—twins. And how could one expect them to survive,

if all the men of the family didn't have their heads shaved immediately?"

Mr. Lugg couldn't do anything but confirm the words of the dwarf, and the latter was so grieved at our dismay that I ended by consoling him. But every single scene in which he had appeared before his avuncularly tonsorial fling, had to be started all over again. It was also necessary to repeat many other shots which did not include the dwarf, but which did include a bit player who appeared as well in some of the dwarf's scenes and who (since he had long ago been paid off, and had subsequently disappeared) now had to be replaced throughout the film.

Soon afterwards we were treated to the next instalment in "The Case of the Cantankerous Custodian". It could be titled "Tempest in the Lovers' Pond", from the name of the exquisite pool formed, at a secluded point, by a sparkling spring whose crystal-clear waters had been used for ages as the tribe's Cupid. Whenever a young warrior wanted to make rapid headway with a girl who was (or who he thought was) cold to him, he was to hide there in a mossy grotto, taking care not to be discovered, and wait until that virgin came to fetch water.

By an equally strong and old tradition, neither that particular virgin nor any other would ever go to that spring, *just* to fill her calabash and then go off straight away. No man must ever be visible there; but what girl could be sure that there was not someone, crouching and watchful in that little, bramble-masked grotto? There might be no one hiding there, or there might be a certain hoped-for person, or one the girl didn't care a hoot about—or maybe a stranger who could turn out to be a real catch. At any rate, that was a very special spring, and no virgin went there without following scrupulously the routine prescribed by tradition, etiquette and self-interest.

First of all, throughout her visit to that delightful spot, the girl would keep looking round, with a most innocent air, as if afraid of being surprised there—but never allowing her eyes to roam as far as the grotto. Then, standing on a certain smooth, sunny rock, on which there fell a pretty waterfall, she would fill the calabash and lift it to a higher rock. After another, not too searching,

glance around she would, reassured, take off all her clothes (few as they were), lay them next to the calabash, and start her ablutions, turning slowly round and round, so as to let the bubbling, cool water of the little fall splash and caress, one by one, all her charms. A few steps backward, and the girl would again begin her leisurely turning around and, with slight gestures, offer to the sun each bit of her silk-like skin, to be dried. Then it would be time to get back into her simple clothing, lift the full calabash to her head and start back on the steep winding path, being very careful never to turn her head until well out of sight of the Lovers' Pond.

As soon as the girl had disappeared behind the first turn of the path, the young man (if one had been in the grotto and had what we call honourable intentions), would slip out of the grotto, go to the very spot where the girl had stood, fill his mouth with water that had touched her body and spit it out in her direction, three times, at the same time thinking hard: "As I love you, *you* shall love me. As I want to marry you, *you* shall want to marry me!"

A charming (for once) variation of the ever-present "body-hex", reinforced by the Zulus' recognition of the power of suggestion, this magic was considered absolutely infallible. Hence our troubles. Siliva didn't mind taking a chance, because Mdabuli, being a royal princess, was a cut above him. The virgin herself just giggled, game to try anything. But Sourpuss would not hear of such nonsense. The young man, also of royal blood, to whom his ward was betrothed, was away. It was he who had hired Sourpuss as the custodian of the girl's virtue, made a down-payment of a cow and promised another if, upon his return, all was well with the said virtue. In other words, in this case, it was for Sourpuss not only a matter of principle but also of two valuable head of cattle. No, he replied to all my arguments—nothing doing—not, at least, until the absent fiancé was back and could take over.

Naturally, I couldn't waste time waiting for this fiancé, when the expedition's overheads consisted of enough pounds sterling to purchase scores of cows a day. The simplest way out, I suggested, was to photograph Mdabuli one day and Siliva the next day, when the water in which she had stood was miles away, and the pond would have lost all its radioactivity, so to speak. Or, what about the

other way round—Siliva one day and the girl not even near the place until the morrow?

There was, still, nothing doing. That magic, said Sourpuss, had never failed in man's memory. How could he be sure that it would not work this once, simply because we tampered with it? And if our precautions proved insufficient—what would happen to him?

All right, I concluded; if that happened, I would agree to pay a cow to him, return another to the absent innamorato, and give a present of an extra one to each of them. Fair enough? Well, yes, mumbled The Cantankerous Custodian, as if such an agreement broke his heart. Then he turned round, and again hoisted his smirk of victory.

And what happened? For once, the magic of the Lovers' Pond, having been tampered with, didn't work at all; or not at least, in the way Sourpuss had feared. Incidentally, that day I was congratulating myself on having completed the job while, at the same time, saving five cows, when I noticed how downcast Sourpuss looked.

"Okay," I relented "You haven't been very cantankerous since we made our bargain. Yet you seem sorry for what you have lost because all went well. So, if there is no more funny business from you from now on, you'll get an extra *banzela* of two cows."

We shook hands on that, and the irritating smirk returned to that sour puss. Maybe that was his undoing. At any rate, even my soft-heartedness was not enough to save his bacon.

There came a morning when I hired for the day a young scar-faced warrior named Bejana, who had just happened to appear at our camp on his return from a big dance, still in splendidly colourful regalia. What he was supposed to do was to enter the hut of Siliva (supposedly an old friend), chat with him, and then act as his messenger, taking to Mdabuli the traditional beaded snuff-box which meant: "Will you marry me?" and which etiquette prohibited the suitor to present in person.

The very elementary action in Siliva's hut dragged on throughout the whole morning, and was responsible for a lot of sweat from all of us, plus a dozen costly "takes". Seldom had I seen such a stiff, gauche, thick-headed, self-conscious idiot. Immediately after a

rushed lunch, I resignedly resumed work, prepared to fire Bejana and start all over again with somebody else, if he didn't get better during the next couple of hours.

To our intense surprise, the minute I got him to kneel in front of Mdabuli, he turned into an entirely different man. He presented the snuff-box with a flourish that would have been admired at a king's court; his talk became fluent, his movements graceful and expressive. As if by some perverted, delayed action of the Lovers' Pond magic, Mdabuli began to bubble over with dimpled smiles and coquettish gestures. Just one "take" for each shot, and everything was perfect. Oddly enough, throughout the day, Sourpuss, probably still dreaming of the two unexpected cows which were to come to him out of the blue, had made no objections.

That evening, I paid Bejana, gave him a generous *banzela* and said good-bye to him. Did the son of a gun thank me? Oh, no: he launched into such a voluble peroration that I couldn't understand a word of it. Dube, instead of helping me, let out a startled exclamation. Then, laughing like a fool, he slapped his thighs, dropped to the ground and rolled and rolled, until his magnificent blue suit was yellow with dust. It took me a while to sober him up, to get him back to his feet and to his duties. Finally, Dube explained: during that one scene, the first time they had seen each other, Bejana and Mdabuli had fallen suddenly, irrevocably, in love. Bejana understood only too well that he wasn't needed any longer; but, from then on, he simply wouldn't think of letting her out of his sight even for a minute. So, whether there was work for him or not, either we kept, sheltered, fed and paid him, or he would go—taking her away with him.

In the little crowd which had gathered round us, Sourpuss, too indignant for speech, was uttering apoplectic sounds. But Biyela was there, too. As Royal Chief, and as Mdabuli's actual uncle, he was both furious and vocal. And did he bellow! He ordered Bejana off, Mdabuli back to her hut. No more nonsense, he threatened, or he would make them regret that they had ever been born!

A few hours later, pandemonium broke loose throughout the camp. I ran out of my trailer to investigate and found out that,

while our actors were having dinner in the commissary tent, Mdabuli had quietly slipped out and disappeared. Obviously, Bejana had returned in the darkness and, fooling our night watchman, managed to abduct her. Also missing were her blankets and the entire wardrobe we had bought for her.

Early next morning, a still-spluttering Royal Chief and a grimmer than ever Sourpuss piled into one of our native-driven jeeps, and dashed off in pursuit. It was four long days before they found and brought back Mdabuli. What had happened in the interval, the suddenly taciturn virgin would not say. Ignoring all questions, she just smiled at the meaningless patterns that her toes were dreamily scratching in the yellow dust.

I asked Chief Biyela why she was so tightly wrapped in one of his own yellow blankets. Gruffly, with one pull, he wrenched it off her. "Look," he said, pointing at her 3-inch-wide, dancing skirt. "Bejana has left her nothing else!" He was deeply shocked; and so was I, when I thought of the time it would take us to assemble exact replicas of the various costumes Mdabuli had already worn. "Well," I soothed him, "at least she still has her honour left."

Obviously, they knew better.

"Three, maybe four cows lost to me!" exploded Sourpuss. "Yet, she laughs!" He shook an accusing forefinger at an impishly smiling Mdabuli, abruptly turned round and strode off. The serial of Sourpuss was concluded. The ex-custodian of the ex-virgin's ex-virtue had departed from our midst, never to return.

Though Sashelo's wife (the "Witchdoctress of Love") and everybody else pitched in with rare gusto, it took time before a complete replica of Mdabuli's wardrobe was ready. Then, we tried to make up for the time lost by working with redoubled energy.

The first scene on the programme was one in which Mdabuli's best girl friend was to act as her messenger and take to Siliva the correct answer to his snuff-box—a necklace of coloured beads whose pattern said: "I love you, too". These shots were part of a quite extensive sequence, which had been abruptly interrupted by Mdabuli's elopement. Now, barring complications, what little remained to be photographed could be finished in a couple of

hours. Then, the messenger girl was to be paid off and left free to return to the kraal of her parents.

Mdabuli still looked more dreamy than contrite, which couldn't have suited that particular scene better. The messenger girl, quite cute in her hairdress of bristling pigtails, was even more willing than usual. In no time, she got the point of all I wanted her to do. We had one more rehearsal, and everything was just right. Then: "Augh!" she exclaimed. And away she ran like a startled gazelle.

In a few minutes, she was back, beaming, looking immensely relieved. It was our turn to be startled—to put it mildly. "But," said the girl noticing our stricken faces, "bad luck would befall Mdabuli, should I have carried her first love letter before cutting my tresses. Everybody knows that. I just remembered, and . . ."

"Dube," I roared. "Run! Get those pigtails! We'll pin them on—quick!"

Dube didn't budge. He just stared at me, his nose significantly twitching. The characteristic smell of burning hair was already in the breeze. Of course, I realized with anguish, the girl hadn't dared to leave her tresses around. So, up in smoke the pigtails had gone!—together with all our hopes for that morning, and together with the scores of scenes in which the girl had already appeared.



Needless to say, our struggle with superstitions was not only along the "body-hex" lines. At the least expected, most inconvenient moments, some new front was always bound to open up.

Take Siliva, for instance. His mother had been sick before. In fact she had died, poor soul. But then, surprisingly, she was sick again. Once more she had died. Then she seemed to have miraculously re-revived, for she fell sick a third time. On each occasion, Siliva had to be allowed to go to his father's distant kraal, lest a curse should fall upon his own life. Now, the mother had decided to die again!

"A friend just brought me word," he said with a long face. "Tomorrow I must go for the funeral but, as usual, I will be back in four days—without fail."

Mr. Lugg was with us that morning. I asked his help, and at once he began to put Siliva through it. Then he turned to me: "It is true, you know, that a Zulu is afraid of a life-long curse if he doesn't go home (if he possibly can), to take care of a sick parent or to bury a dead one."

"That's fine and dandy," I protested. "But this is the *third time* his mother has died!"

"Bad luck. But, for all we know," Mr. Lugg smiled, "we may be in for six more. . . ."

"*What?*"

"Well, Siliva's actual mother died in childbirth. So that her spirit wouldn't interfere with their having children of their own, each of his father's other wives called Siliva her son. That's an old Zulu custom, you know. But Siliva's father has had ten wives. The one whose funeral is tomorrow is the third to die since Siliva grew up. Each of them he had called 'mother' all his life, just as he calls the six surviving ones 'mother'. So, you see."

I did see so well that, this time, I sent Siliva home by jeep. With him, I sent Dube, to take to the father and his six remaining wives some quite impressive presents, and my promise of even larger ones if no further mishap interfered with our work. The mission was a success. Coincidence or not, the multiple-mother epidemic *did* stop. For all the rest of our stay in Zululand, we had no more complications.

That is—not on that account.

"NKOSI PUTUMA"

TABOOS and voodooes, superstitions and traditions were definitely not our only troubles. Drinking was another bad one. The first episode of this category was more amusing than anything else—even though it could have got me in bad with the authorities. The hero was our jovial, enormously fat chief. Biyela was a born ham. He liked nothing better than ordering people brusquely around or breaking into gargantuan laughs, for the bioscope as well as in real life. The only thing which went against the grain with him was the business of appearing depressed, weak or despondent—which I needed him to do in a group of "sick" scenes, meant to show the effects of the debilitating poison that Twabeni was slipping to him, under the guise of doctoring and treating him.

After a long day under the scorching sun and blistering batteries of reflectors, I was exhausted. I had just given up, and had practically collapsed into an armchair in my trailer-office. I was trying to gather enough strength to go and take a reinvigorating shower, when a group of muscular warriors came into view, moving at the pace of a funeral procession, and carefully carrying Chief Biyela. Then he must have whispered an order, because they gently lowered him to the ground near my trailer, and retreated with worried head-shakings. I forgot my fatigue and ran out.

"I am dying," Biyela moaned. "I am dying, *Nkosi*."

He looked so far gone that, even though in South Africa it was severely prohibited to give a drop of liquor to a native, I dashed back to my bar to grab a bottle of gin and a little glass, rushed to kneel near the huge panting mass of the chief, and pulled out the cork: "Would a drop of gin . . ."



Siliva went through such difficult scenes as this so conscientiously that at times he actually fainted.

The Sangoma in his ritual dance.





A pupil of the Sangoma going through her paces.

The Sangoma with the heads of two poisonous snakes in his mouth.



Lightning couldn't have been quicker than the speed with which Biyela grabbed the bottle and guzzled its contents.

I hastily retrieved the bottle. "Hey! don't you know I could go to jail . . ." but the bottle was again out of my hand—and gurgling. Once more I snatched it back. Less than half the contents remained.

Biyela smacked his lips. "Nobody has seen," he guffawed. "And I won't tell. Thanks." And, springing to his feet, he briskly trotted off, his enormous belly shaking with laughter, as if at a great joke. And that's what in a way it was, because he had managed to fool me with the very symptoms which I had sweated the whole day, with no success at all, to teach him for his part, before the cameras.

As I have said, this occurrence meant that I had broken the law. But it also suggested to me how I might break a time-devouring impasse. The following morning, as I went to a waiting Biyela, to resume work, I left what remained of the bottle of gin semi-hidden behind the wheels of a jeep. Casually glancing at it, I again told Biyela what I wanted. By an extraordinary coincidence, in less than half an hour all his "sick" scenes were completed to perfection. Equally surprising was it that, less than half a minute after I had dismissed the chief and told him to get some rest, both he and the gin bottle had disappeared from sight.

Talking about drinks (and mixing my metaphors a bit), a very different cup of tea, and a real headache, was the *isishimeyana*. This is a potion most strictly prohibited by the law, because it tends to turn an occasional drinker into a dangerous brute, and to transform one who becomes addicted to it, from a decent man into a most dangerous cheat, thief and murderer.

This horrible concoction is made by pouring water into fermented treacle and keeping the mixture in the heat for a day or so. It can also be made from brown sugar and water. Sugar mixed with ordinary Kaffir beer (which is powerful, but not dangerous if taken in moderate quantities—say, no more than a couple of gallons at a time) also makes an ultra-potent liquor. In fact, Zulus have become adept at making these beverages out of many ingredients. A little carbide is also added by some local gourmets to give the liquor more *chic* and kick. And recently they have also learned to make a super-*isishimeyana*, by distilling the latter over a fire and

passing the steam through long reeds to cool it off (and so condense it) into another container. When ready, this drink is of the same consistency as O.P. rum. It is known as *consi* ("drip"), *ingamazi* and by other names, according to the different localities. But, wherever it is drunk, it is sure to produce a crop of *mafufugnani*—crazy ones.

The first *mafufugnani* to be discovered in our camp was Samuel Xulu, Ellen's most dignified and reliable cook. Suddenly he turned into a wild beast; and when I tried to send him to sleep it off, he actually tried to cut my throat with a very long, sharp kitchen knife. The next was Alfred, one of our best and safest Zulu drivers. While he was taking me to Eshowe, he began to bear left across the wide, luckily empty, road, and to get nearer and nearer to a sheer precipice. We were about to jump to an untimely end, when I pulled myself together and snatched the wheel out of his hands—not one split second too soon, either.

When, during an unexpected tour of inspection, I found that Bukile, the senior of our two night watchmen, had completely passed out, I began to realize several things. One, that it was probably due to Bukile's addiction to *isishimeyana* that Bejana had so easily managed to abduct Mdabuli, a few nights before; the other that the source of *isishimeyana* must be either very near our clearing, or even in it. For I happened to know that Bukile had not left camp for a number of weeks, and anyway he didn't know many local natives, because he was a Nyassa and didn't even speak their language. In fact, Ellen and I always talked with him in Swahili—a continuous source of great amusement to all our Zulus, who never ceased to marvel at the *Mnumzana* (the master) and his *Nkosikazi's* fluent conversations with an African, in a language of which they didn't understand one word.

It took a good many hours, several buckets of cold water thrown at his face and imposing doses of emetic, castor oil and anything else Doctor Bliss could manage to think of, before we succeeded in bringing Bukile back to life. Then, with the help of all my technicians and Chief Biyela, I started a serious investigation. While all the Africans waited in a silent group in the middle of the clearing, we searched every vehicle, every tent, every last corner of the camp. We found not a thing.

Since Alfred had been immediately dismissed as too dangerous, and Samuel, the cook, was still cooling off in jail, Bukile was the only witness who could have given us some useful information but, of course, he wouldn't say a word. Acting on a hunch, I asked him to show me how much money he had left, which he couldn't refuse to do. But all he could produce was a few shillings and pence. This was strange, because he had never moved from camp since the night when he had given the alarm about Ellen having fainted in her trailer and bleeding so badly that a rivulet of blood was dripping down the folding stairs. For his alertness that night, which had probably saved Ellen's life, I had given him an extraordinary *banzela* of ten pounds—a lot of money for an African, who was already abundantly fed, well sheltered, supplied with uniforms and even with a daily ration of cigarettes.

It then flashed into my mind (frankly, I don't know why) that the elderly Zulu woman who lived as a sort of caretaker in two little rooms in the far corner of our "studio", had recently been sporting a variety of bright new head-scarves, instead of the greasy old one to which we had become accustomed.

I sent Dube to call her; and when they came (she with yet another bright new scarf on her head) I had him question her. Needless to say, she was indignant. She had never even heard of bad beer. She was just a poor, hard-working woman, who had been abandoned by a good-for-nothing husband, and who devoted her entire life to bringing up her two sons, Matata and Zee-po (very nice youngsters whom we had enrolled as bioscope brothers of Siliva).

Bukile claimed to know even less. *Isishimeyana*? Despite the evident ravages left by his recent "illness", he swore in the most solemn manner that he didn't even know the meaning of the word. Didn't I realize that he spoke no Zulu, but only the Swahili of his fathers?

Then I really lost my temper. Noticing a protuberance in Bukile's coat, I reached into his pocket and pulled out a blackened metal can, which smelled strongly of *consi*, the "drip" super-variety of *isishimeyana*. When he still denied knowing anything about it, with a silly gesture of impotent fury I threw the can high into the air.

By chance, it landed in the middle of the low-pitched roof of the "studio".

Instantly, seeing the can begin to roll lazily down the roof, I had an inspiration. Borrowing from the superstitions of the Zulus, I yelled, first in English (for Dube to translate at once), and then in Swahili: "Now, the great God will show you!"

The eyes of everybody, white and black, went towards the slowly rolling can, stared when it made as if to stop against the gutter, intently followed its hesitation there. But I knew it would fall: "Don't move," I said. "If it touches anybody, that's the guilty one!"

The can lurched, rolled over a support of the gutter, then leaped downward. But it never reached the ground. Instead it landed squarely in the middle of the caretaker's huge bosom.

Her face turned a dirty grey, and the rest was easy. Faced by such an unquestionable sign from Ngungungulu, the great God, the woman readily admitted her beastly, illegal activities, and to having taken all Bukile's money as well as plenty from the cook and Alfred. Of course, the *malini* had long since all gone, in part to purchase the ingredients of her nefarious trade, the balance to buy all those bright new scarves at the Indian store.

Being soft-hearted, and considering her two small children, I was inclined to let her off with a fright. But Biyela was immovable, and after all he was the paramount chief of the territory, and knew what he was doing. He instantly took her to the police, and we soon heard that she had been convicted as a "*shebeen queen*" and had received a jail sentence of two months—which, however, did not disturb Matata and Zee-po in the least. The kind head-wife of Sashelo who, as I have already mentioned, was an ex-Witch-doctress of Love and was also playing that part in our bioscope and therefore living in our camp with her husband, took better care of the children than their mother had done. As for us, the lucky fall of that dirty little can had put an end to the appearance of *mafufuguni* in our midst.

In the meantime, what with one thing and another, our original "three months" had run out, and with them our share of steady good weather (as well as most of our hopes of finally getting hold of that famous Sangoma, who was beginning to look like another

myth). As I have had to experience a good many times before in Africa, we had got to one of those frustrating periods when the sun seemed to enjoy playing dirty tricks on us. It would shine as brightly as anything, for just long enough to let us get all set up and ready. Then it would disappear behind heavy clouds, and there it would stay, as if in ambush, until we were ready to give up. Then, out it would pop, only to repeat the performance all over again.

So, back we fell upon our big, providential barn, the dancing hall-warehouse-studio. Out of it went the coloureds' hundreds of roughly-built chairs and all our stores and provisions, which had to find shelter in half a dozen big, spare tents. Into it went our divers with improvised ladders and huge rolls of heavy paper, to seal wall cracks and all windows, broken or not. Into it also went the Hut-Maker and his assistant (as soon as we had bailed them all out of jail again), with a horde of labourers, and all the grass and saplings necessary to build precise replicas of about half of every hut we had used as background for our exteriors. Of course, the reason for this "bisection" was that the missing portion would allow lights and lenses and mikes to reach freely into the accurately furnished and properly interior-decorated half of each different hut—of Biyela's, Mdabuli's, those of Siliva, Sukumbana, Twabeni, Sashelo and the others.

In and out we all went, supervising the construction of the wooden platforms into which the Hut-Maker would stick the arched saplings that were to form the skeleton of each half-hut; checking the packing of tons of soil with which to hide the concrete floor; sound recording, cutting and projecting rooms; unpacking and testing the lighting equipment. . . .

"Come on, men! Hurry up! *Putuma*. Quick, quick! *Putuma*!"

Our power-generating plants were moved nearer the doors, ready to supply enough "juice" for a small Hollywood studio. Movie, still, and sound equipment, umbrellas, reflectors, folding tables and chairs, all the paraphernalia normally used on location, were brought in from trucks and jeeps. A young fortune in props was carted in from the huts of the villains' big kraal in the clearing.

"Come on, *Putuma*! The rains are going to start soon. *Putuma*, boys, *putuma*!"

I said and repeated and yelled that word so persistently, in those days, that my name became *Nkosi Putuma*, "Master Quick-Quick". To the very end of the expedition, our youngest actor, four-year old Lee-po, couldn't see me appear without letting out a squeaky "*Nkosi Putuma*", before running away from my mock wrath, with all the speed afforded to him by his wobbly little legs. But, by pressing everybody into work, by keeping that crazy pandemonium going, with the help of frequent rounds of cigarettes for the men, of sweets for the women and children and, for all of them, of thick slices of jam-covered bread, mugs of thickly sugared, strong tea, and carefully calculated quantities of mild Kaffir beer, things got accomplished at a pace never before seen in Zululand's entire history.

Before the rains started in earnest, the immense hall was cluttered with half-huts of all shapes and kinds, and proper interior decoration; with machinery of all sorts; with props of every type. The place seemed filled to capacity. Its appearance of utter confusion was further enhanced by the tangles of heavy electric cables criss-crossing over the hard, packed soil on the floor and reaching upward in all directions.

Yet things were beginning to click. In that makeshift Zululand studio, interiors as good as any shot in Hollywood were piling up; parcels of exposed negative (to be flown back to the States for processing and printing) became ready faster than ever before.

The large doors would open, and, in the sudden quiet of silenced power plants, strange orders, questions and exclamations rang out into the rain-drenched clearing: "Scene 135b, Take 1 . . . Lift that baby spot . . . Shift those barn-doors . . . Got that colour still? . . . Testing, testing: one two three four . . . Hey, put those lights on low . . . Move that converter, it's in the field . . . Come on, boys, *putuma* . . . Where are the other drivers? . . . Boy, give me the baby legs . . . You, take away this gobo . . . Checking focus . . . Pass the broad-head, will you? . . . Hand me the double scrim . . . Ready? O.K. . . Turn on the 25,000 plant . . . Close the doors . . . *Putuma*, for heaven's sake! . . ."

As our two smartly-uniformed camp policemen closed the doors, the shooting was resumed inside, on a new stage. Everyone, white or

Zulu, was doing his best and enjoying it. Work was proceeding with good-humoured, well-timed team effort—as speedily as in the best appointed, most capacious studio in California. It was fun. There was a lot of satisfaction in having fooled the sun before it could fool us, in going ahead day after day with a production which we felt was the tops, in seeing the script's pages which were still to be shot, get fewer and fewer. It was fun, even when the chickens, cocks, dogs and goats (my brilliantly "realistic touch") suddenly decided to put on an act of their own, as if trying to crash the gate for admission to the "Screen Actors' Guild of Zululand".

These unscheduled performances, which generally had a tendency to explode in the middle of a complicated take, were usually livened up by particularly spirited, noisy, all-disrupting chases, when two devilishly mischievous cats appeared from nobody knew where. In a few seconds, they managed to raise hell all round. Then, the instant I yelled: "Catch 'em, boys, *putuma*", the cats would *putuma* away and disappear as if by magic—until the next time, of course.

It wasn't so much fun, when one of our main "actors" was inspired to remind us that our little Hollywood was still very much in Zululand—entirely at the mercy of any of our Zulus' fresh whims, new quirks or the resurfacing in them of ancient superstitions. It was even less fun when a certain piece of deeply disconcerting news reached us. We had finally located and contacted a Sangoma—whose only trouble was that, through the messenger's awed words, he sounded almost too good. Though he was making a fortune apparently, by accomplishing (it was said) actual miracles almost every day, including raising the dead from the grave, he was prepared to leave his flourishing practice for a while, and come to work for the bioscope for any length of time, to do absolutely anything we required of him. All he wanted before leaving his far kraal, was a licence in writing to practise in Chief Biyela's territory. The Magistrate was the only personage who could issue such a licence; and Mr. Lugg, an old friend of his, went to request it. "Certainly," said the Magistrate. "But in a few days—when I have had time to investigate this miracle man."

A week later, Mr. Lugg received an official note from his friend. The marvellous Sangoma was a most marvellous impostor, a cattle

thief, a seducer of virgins and a few other things. Both he and a son of his, his main accomplice, had been arrested, and it would be a long time before they came out of jail. "Thanks for having attracted my attention to the activities of these two ruffians," concluded the note. "By the way, the name of the son, if you don't know it, is Bejana."

"Mdabuli's abductor," bellowed the Royal Chief, with righteous indignation. "He who took everything—everything—from her!"

In order to make the reader realize what this piece of news meant to us, perhaps it would be helpful if, at this point, I were to give a brief synopsis of the story of the feature film, by which, with an absolute minimum of poetic licence, we were attempting to reproduce some of the most characteristic customs, superstitions, situations and dramas of true Zulu life.

"BITTER SPEARS"

ROYAL Chief Biyela has (to use the present tense customary in the outline of a film's story) no surviving children except a daughter, princess Mdabuli. In such a case, by ancient custom, "he who is accepted as her husband will become the Royal Successor". She has two principal suitors. One is the crafty, wealthy Sashelo, the Witchdoctor of Smell and brother of Twabeni, the Medicine Man—who, under the pretence of treating the Chief, is secretly giving him small doses of a poison which will ultimately kill him. Once the Chief is gone, if Sashelo manages to marry Mdabuli, and so to become the Royal Successor, he and his brother will have a good time for the rest of their lives.

The other suitor is an orphan—handsome, brave, honest Siliva, who wants Mdabuli for no other reason than that he loves her, but who has barely enough cattle to pay the dowry fixed for her, let alone set aside something for his two small, deeply devoted brothers, Matata and Zee-Po.

The other obstacle between the two villains and the success of their criminal plans is old Sukumbana, the extremely loyal, reliable *induna* (the highest counsellor of the Royal Chief), who is beginning to suspect that something is wrong with the prolonged illness of his master, and to have some inkling of Twabeni's and Sashelo's plot.

Despite the indifference that Mdabuli tries to show towards Siliva at a great dance, the first thing she does that day is to run off to consult the Witchdoctress of Love about the best way to make sure of Siliva's love. The kind Witchdoctress suggests the magic of the Lovers' Pond—and is not a bit disturbed when she notices

that Matata has overheard her words and rushed way—evidently to inform his big brother.

The magic of the Lovers' Pond having worked as perfectly as usual, Siliva takes the next step, which is to send to Mdabuli, by his friend Bejana, the beaded snuff-box which means "I love you". The Royal Chief and Sukumbana happen to watch this simple ceremony, and they beam with approval.

Also present is Twabeni, who naturally becomes uneasy and decides to take immediate steps. He goes at once to the secluded cave of his slave, the Evil Dwarf, and orders him to watch for the right opportunity, and then to pour an amphora of reddish liquid into the small stream where Siliva's cattle go to drink every afternoon. The Evil Dwarf gets his chance when he learns that Mdabuli has sent her closest friend to Siliva, with the traditional necklace which means "I love you, too", together with a casual suggestion that if he were to be, at a certain time, at a secluded, pretty little spot, he might happen to meet her there, alone.

During that night all the cattle of Siliva's kraal mysteriously die. The following morning, Matata is doubly in despair because it was he who, in Siliva's absence, had herded the cattle to the stream and back to their enclosure. Upon the suggestion of the desolate Mdabuli, he accompanies Siliva to the Royal Chief to explain what has happened. Then Siliva asks whether there is anything that the chief, in his wisdom, can suggest? Isn't there any difficult, perilous mission which he, Siliva, could attempt for his chief and which, if successful, might bring him enough cattle to buy the hand of Mdabuli?

Sukumbana, the sage *induna*, has a very good idea for a mission of this kind. After Matata has been dismissed, the old man murmurs insistently into the ear of the Royal Chief who, after some hesitation, gives in. "All right," he says to Siliva. "Try to get to the Sorcerer of Life, who lives in the distant mountains of the north. Explain my sickness to him, beg him for the Essence of Life. Bring me this infallible antidote which will save my life, restore my health and strength—and Mdabuli shall be your wife, you my successor."

"But," adds the Chief, "this means that you will have to cross dangerous territory which no one knows. And my very survival

depends upon the success of this secret mission. Nobody must know that you will be leaving in a few days—far less, where you are going, or why. Also, before you start, I must be certain of your courage and self-control. In eight days, at sunrise, leave your kraal without telling your brothers, climb to the top of the Sacred Hill, pass between the two great euphorbia trees which top it, and do not turn your head—*whatever happens to you*. If you pass this test, go ahead. And may Ngqungqungulu protect you in your journey."

From a distance, Twabeni and Sashelo notice this private conference. They have no idea what had been said, but, to be on the safe side, they decide to dispose at once of Sukumbana who appears to them to be up to something. Only, the old man is too much loved and revered by the entire tribe, too close to the Royal Chief. Die he must, but in a manner which will leave no clue, arouse no suspicions. The answer is the subtle—and safe—classic Zulu way, the devilish witchcraft which goes under the name of the Red Ball of Death.

While the *induna* is sound asleep (because of a potion administered to him by Twabeni), Sashelo sneaks into his hut, cuts some hair off his old head, then quickly goes to the frightening, always deserted, Place of Snakes. There he hastens to prepare the Red Ball of Death. For centuries this most dreaded witchcraft has been made by wrapping the prospective victim's hair in a piece of red cloth together with the fangs and skin of a venomous snake and some heavily poisonous roots. The whole is then tied up with vegetable rope, boiled in a pot, to the accompaniment of magic curses, and finally hung from a branch high above the nest of snakes.

In a few days, the vegetable rope rots, disintegrates. When Red Ball falls among the deadly creatures beneath, the predestined victim is done for. At that precise moment, regardless of where he is at the time, he will be bitten by a poisonous snake. Nothing will save him from immediate death—nor will there be anything left to indicate the identity of the remote-control assassin.

The morning comes when Siliva (of course knowing nothing of the Red Ball) makes sure that nobody is watching him, leaves his little brothers asleep and slips away from his kraal. Following

instructions, he starts by way of the Sacred Hill. As he passes between the great euphorbia trees which top it, an assegai flashes through the air and barely misses him. Siliva is not wounded, but his first instinct is to turn round and fight what he thinks is a dastardly, cowardly attacker. But the chief's words come back to his mind; he struggles against his almost overpowering impulse, manages to conquer it, and goes off without turning his head.

Sukumbana, who has so skilfully thrown the spear, emerges from the bushes. His eyes smiling with pride and anticipation, the old man watches the ramrod-stiff back of Siliva disappear into the distance—and his own right foot steps on a puff-adder. Far away, the Red Ball of Death has just fallen. The snake strikes viciously. Nobody is near to help. Sukumbana cannot reach his ankle to suck out the puff-adder's poison. In a few minutes he is dead.

Twabeni and Sashelo are informed by the Evil Dwarf that Siliva has been observed by a woman as he walked northwards, but they have no idea where he is going. Leaving the dwarf on day-and-night guard on top of a hill, to watch, and to warn them in time when Siliva returns, they are quick to take advantage of Sukumbana's death. Subtly but persistently, they accuse Siliva of having caused it, and even of the Royal Chief's worsening illness. They hold open house in their kraal, with plenty of kaffir beer for all. They spread suspicion and false accusations, make inflammatory speeches, manage so well to convince the tribe that Siliva has abandoned his little brothers and disappeared only to escape punishment, that the warriors are all set to jump on him and vent their anger on him the moment he returns—if he ever dares to return.

And this they do as soon as an exhausted Siliva, weary from his long, exciting, perilous but successful journey, does return. Unaware that the scene is being observed by Matata (who is hidden in the foliage of a tree to watch Twabeni's suspicious movements), Siliva had barely time to drop a beaded belt, the innocent-looking container of the magic medicine for the Royal Chief, before a horde of drunken madmen, led by Twabeni and Sashelo, grab him and drag him to the brothers' big kraal.

There, Sashelo, with the unanimous approval of hundreds of warriors, goes into a trance and conducts the prohibited Smell

Ceremony. After leaping here and there and sniffing at a dozen supposedly possible suspects, he picks Siliva as the guilty one. Any doubt that might remain in the minds of the few sober elders, is wiped out when Siliva's guilt is confirmed by the further test of the Boiling Cauldron. Then nothing can restrain the anger of the mob. Despite his protestations of complete innocence, Siliva is tied to the ancient Tree of Torture. Drunken with beer, demented with blood-lust, all the warriors, jumping and yelling, form a tighter and tighter circle round the defenceless youth. Every few minutes, a warrior breaks away from the circle, aims his assegai at Siliva's chest, and strikes—but never deeply, so as to make the torture last as long as possible.

Matata, terrorized by what he has seen, does not waste a second. Frantically, he runs with the news, and the belt dropped by Siliva, to the Royal Chief who, almost instantly revived by the Sorcerer's Essence of Life, gathers his guards and hastens to the traitor's place, stopping only twice in order to swallow some more of the magic medicine from the belt.

Biyela and his guards arrive just in time to save the already badly wounded Siliva. He orders the arrest of the chief plotters, who are taken away under strong escort. He threatens the warriors with severe punishment. Before commanding that that kraal of perfidy be wiped off the face of his territory, Biyela proclaims Siliva the husband of Mdabuli, and the Royal Successor. Against the background of cracking, roaring flames, which flare up all round the grand circle of huts, the suddenly sobered, chastened warriors accept and celebrate the announcement with a wild waving of shields, knobkerries and assegais, and with a deep throated war chant—the *inkondhlo* national song of the glorious conquering days of the proud Zulu race.

* * *

This sketchy outline necessarily leaves out a lot of fascinating details, including the many and various adventures encountered by Siliva in his long journey to the wise Sorcerer of Life and back. I should add, however, that every single one of the episodes described above (and of those I have omitted) were strickly authentic in every detail. Some were based on my own personal observations

of thirty-four years before, and on the experiences I had had among the Zulus at that time. Of others I had learnt from the Rev. A. T. Bryant, a scientist who had retired to Zululand in 1883 and spent the rest of his life in close contact with the Zulus, studying them, mastering their language, digging into their history, their customs, their most secret ceremonies and witchcrafts and scrupulously recording everything in a big book which became a classic. It is important to note that, at the time of his arrival, men of an older generation were still alive; which meant that Father Bryant was able to become familiar with, and to gain the confidence of, chiefs, *indunas*, witchdoctors, and warriors who had actually lived and fought under Shaka, "the Napoleon of the South"—the great Zulu King, who had conquered a hundred small independent native states and amalgamated them into the Zulu nation.

Everything in our script and in our entire production was further checked step by step, and jealously watched over down to the tiniest particular, by Mr. Lugg, so as to ensure that "Bitter Spears" would be an absolutely accurate, panoramic view of Zulu life, past and present—a genuine record in beautiful colour and true sound. And one, incidentally, that I am convinced could never again be undertaken, even less achieved.

Needless to say, this record could not be completed without the participation of a really first-class Witchdoctor of Snakes. Such a Sangoma was indispensable if we were to handle safely all the scenes connected with snakes. Furthermore, I had my heart set on making one of the highlights of Siliva's journey to the far Sorcerer of Life, his discovery of a Sangoma's hidden place.—such as the one I had found, and spied upon, many years ago. I wanted Siliva to watch (unobserved, of course) some of the most striking of a Sangoma's rites, including the frightening propitiation dance, during which the Sangoma was literally covered with poisonous snakes, from head to foot—and the almost unbelievable ceremony by which he initiated and trained an apprentice Snake Charmer, Witchdoctor of Snakes and general Medicine Man. . . .

The only hitch was that, despite our concerted efforts, Mr. Lugg, Chief Biyela and I hadn't as yet managed to get hold of a real *bona fide* Sangoma.

THE RED BALL OF DEATH

AS RECENTLY as January 1960, the world press carried lengthy reports of a certain Charlie Yundar, an Australian aboriginal boy of 15, who was wasting to death in the Royal Perth Hospital because he was "convinced that he was going to die by the will of his tribal witchdoctor".

The youth had obstinately refused food and drink, and had then barely spoken for more than a month. He had been in a trance-like state since he had been the victim of the dreaded Bone pointing Ceremony, or *Poncolimpo*. The Bone of Death (it appears that a new one has to be carved from a kangaroo or a human bone for each victim) had been pointed at him, and he had simply been told that he was going to die. Doctors and nurses had forced food into him through a tube. They had tried everything. They had found nothing physically wrong with the boy—except that unshakable conviction of his that he *was doomed to die*.

Naturally these reports were of special interest to me, since they (as well as several similar ones I had read in the past about aborigines in remote parts of central and north-west Australia) reminded me of the dreaded Red Ball of Death, by which the Zulus still occasionally kill an enemy from a distance, *and without his knowledge*. But this last factor puts the Red Ball into a different class of magic from the Bone of Death, the victim of which always knows that one has been used against him, either from the words of a friend, or through finding the magic bone nearby.

How this evil incantation of the Zulus works, is something I have tried, again and again, to explain to my satisfaction, but without success. If the victim were sooner or later informed of what has been done to secure his destruction (as in the case of the Australian

aborigines), one could believe that the power of the victim's easily susceptible, superstition-fed mind might be enough to make him, first, ill, then worse and worse until, ultimately, he died. But that was not at all the case with the Zulus. It was not possible, either, to think that the victim was warned by some kind of telepathy or other extra-sensory perception, and that such a suspicion later turned into certainty, and thence into panic and a life-extinguishing hysteria. An explanation along these lines simply didn't agree with the actual working of the Red Ball of Death. The effects of the latter, as many posthumous investigations have proved beyond contention, are not only infallible but extremely sudden.

For days the threatened man is perfectly healthy, behaves normally and, in some recorded instances has met snakes and destroyed them, or has even been bitten by one and not lost his life. But the very moment that the wind, or an insect, or whatever fate has decided, makes the rope break so that the heavy Red Ball drops into the nest of snakes, the fatal serpent appears and strikes a mortal blow. The pre-doomed victim may be nearby or leagues away from the Place of Snakes; he may be alone and too far from help, or in someone's company, or within hailing distance of a kraal. Unexplainable as this fearful voodoo may be, the fact remains that in a few minutes the man dies a horrible death. This unavoidable conclusion is generally accepted as a matter of course by the white authorities as much as by the Zulus. Many a time, the Magistrate's Court has convicted, and sentenced for attempted murder, a Zulu caught in the initial phases of this dreadful witchcraft—even when, through some extraordinary luck the preparations have been discovered and stopped in time, and no actual death has therefore followed.

Of course, I knew in advance that to get this sequence filmed was going to be tough, really tough. And, consciously or not, for a long time I found plausible excuses for postponing the tackling of it. But the day came when no further delay was possible, and I approached the task with no little trepidation. Nevertheless, I had underestimated the trouble that it was going to give us.

Even though, by then, Sashelo and Sukumbana had worked for



Gatti's party were the first white men ever to watch the "Virgins' Python Dance of Initiation".

Siliva undergoes the "Test by Burning Water".





Sashelo, who cut the hair from Sukumbana's head to make the "Red Ball of Death".

The demented crowd tie Siliva to the "Tree of Torture".



several months with us and had grasped some of the make-believe quality of motion-pictures, I knew of course that, bioscope or not, nothing would ever persuade them to tackle a performance of this nature if they had to follow it straight through from beginning to end. So, first of all, out of the eighty-odd shots of this sequence I selected more than sixty and shuffled, reshuffled, scrambled them up beyond recognition. In fact I camouflaged them so well, that for a while we worked on them without Sashelo and Sukumbana (or Dube, for that matter), realizing what we were doing.

But there was no way of getting round the necessity of Sashelo having to make at least the gesture of cutting some of Sukumbana's hair. As soon as he realized what we wanted, the old man blew up. Accommodating though he usually was, this time he put his foot down really hard. In no uncertain terms he let us know that he wouldn't allow Sashelo even to touch one hair of his head for anything on earth. Sashelo was okay, he said; but, he hastened to add, one never knew what might get into a person's mind when he had, in his possession, another man's hair.

I promised Sukumbana that I, personally, would remove from Sashelo the few hairs he cut from Sukumbana's head and return them to him at once. It was like talking to a wall. Proposals, refusals, discussions continued for half a morning. Finally, I lost patience. I snatched Sashelo's razor-sharp knife, cut off some of my hair (little though I have to spare) and pushed it under the string which held on Sukumbana's head-dress.

Nevertheless, nine takes and two hours later, the old man was still able to snore, most realistically—until he felt Sashelo approaching. Then, up he jumped. Every time Dube and Mr. Lugg did their best to help me explain, but got no further than I did.

In order to distract Sukumbana, I asked him if he would like a drink. "Yes," he said grabbing Twabeni's calabash, and took a long one. I slapped my forehead; for I suddenly remembered that that water still contained quite a lot of the dope which Twabeni had been told to pour into it, for the scene in which he was going to make Sukumbana fall heavily asleep—a scene which because of my Machiavellian re-shuffling had not yet come up, and which we

naturally planned to proceed with only after having emptied the calabash, washed it well and refilled it with pure water.

I explained what had happened to Mr. Lugg, and Sukumbana must have understood, if not my words, at least my gestures. The result was that he let out a sigh, opened his mouth as if to say something, thought better of it, lay down and closed his eyes. "Take 10," came up. Sashelo approached for the tenth time—and the old man didn't even twitch a muscle.

This was wonderful! "King," I called to the chief still photographer. "I will have Sashelo repeat the entire action for you. Take plenty of stills, in colour and in black-and-white. Quick!"

My hair was removed from Sukumbana's head, replaced, and removed again. More than a dozen flashbulbs went off in front of his face; but he remained absolutely motionless.

"Good, Sukumbana, good. Now you can get up. Thanks. Believe me, tonight you'll get a special *banzela*!" And, without giving the matter another thought, I turned away towards another set.

Late that afternoon, the old man was needed for another scene. We called for him, we yelled his name, we sent for him. No Sukumbana. Finally, it occurred to me to go back to where I had last seen him. There he was, still snoring away heavily—fast asleep, because of our combined belief that there was dope in the calabash of Twabeni. But, as it turned out when we questioned the latter, the dope had not been there at all, because (he sheepishly confessed) he had forgotten to bring it from his kraal that morning, though he had not mentioned this for fear of being reprimanded. In other words, the whole business had been simply a case of auto-suggestion; yet it had been more than enough to make Sukumbana sleep heavily for many hours. And it took us several minutes of violent shaking before we could wake him up.

* * *

The making, boiling, cursing and spearing of the Red Ball presented no special difficulty; nor did I bother about the fact that those few hairs of mine were being used among the ingredients. The only obstacle was that, for the whole operation to be effective,

and convincing, it had to be filmed against the background of the tree from which the Red Ball would, later on, be suspended.

Because of my mania for authenticity, I had originally decided to use the actual tree which, for untold generations had been used for this deadly witchcraft. This gigantic tree stood in a sinister spot which all natives were most careful to avoid, being certain that it was inhabited by some of Zululand's most evil spirits. It had taken me weeks to persuade our actors and boys to go with us to inspect the place. Even then, two or three of us had to go ahead, loaded with a full armoury of guns and rifles, before our Zulus would consent to join us. Nor could we blame them, because, though we didn't meet any spirit, bad or otherwise, the rocks below the tree were simply crawling with Africa's most poisonous snakes—green and black mambas, *kokotes* and vipers, cobras and puffadders. Nobody had ever explained why they gathered there in such large numbers. But the spectacle they offered was certainly both revolting and scary.

Luckily, at a short distance from the tree there were some very wide, flat rocks, which gave us an ideal platform for our work and a definite feeling of safety, because no snake could approach us there, unseen. What deeply worried us all, without exception, was the scenes which were soon to follow—scenes which couldn't be either disguised or made palatable, in any way, and which, in one word, were "beastly".

Sashelo had to climb that mammoth tree and slide along a limb of it, to tie the Red Ball directly above the snakes. While in that precarious position, a dry branch was to fall and hit him. He was to lose his balance and almost drop among the snakes—a touch that would get a nice gasp from any audience (to say nothing of the gasps it would get from all of us). Below, the snakes had somehow or other to be stirred up, in order to get them from under the stones and out into the sun (which they hate) and to make them react in a lively fashion, first to the stick which bounced off Sashelo's back, and then to the fatal fall of the Red Ball.

For most of the time, the cameramen and photographers—in order to film, at the same time, Sashelo *and* the snakes, the fraying rope *and* the snakes, the falling Red Ball *and* the snakes—would

have to be positioned higher up on the tree, on higher, weaker, more breakable branches.

Finally, and worst of all, somehow or other we had to engineer the fatal strike of a puff-adder, which would kill Sukumbana. The old *induna*, almost always malleable and co-operative, wasn't so, this time. I don't know how he discovered what we had in mind for his right leg but, when he did, he staged a first class mutiny. Sashelo, brave and tough as he had often proved himself to be, glanced once at the big branch he was supposed to climb, mumbled some harsh words, and just went off—to disappear for almost a week. As a result of these emotional outbursts, Dube began to see what I had in mind. His usual happy grin disappeared; he was ill, he said, and had to go home to his kraal in a hurry. Mr. Lugg, it appeared, could take anything; but he had one phobia, allergy or whatever—snakes. None of my men showed the smallest desire to be on high, unsafe branches, looking into cameras, or absorbed in other jobs, while snakes slithered about all over the place.

As for myself, I detested the idea more than anybody else, for various reasons. For one thing, many years before, at the very beginning of my African career, I had been bitten in both legs by a cobra. The natives of that first safari of mine had saved my life—but only by methods more gruesome and painful than the effects of the bites themselves. Ever since then, along with the scars on my legs, I had retained in my mind a profound dread for the creatures. Also, I knew that whatever action I expected from Sashelo and from any stand-in I might dream up for Sukumbana, I would first have to demonstrate to them every single step, gesture and movement over and over again on Sashelo's branch. Higher up, on the cameramen's branches. Down below, on the brink of the snake nest. Later on, even in the tall grass and thick shrubs near the euphorbia trees, with an angry puff-adder loose somewhere.

Without a competent, efficient, authoritative Sangoma in charge, it would have been folly to attempt this kind of work. Apart from the likelihood of some serious accident, there was the danger that all our "company" would go to pieces. In fact, discontent, rebellion, mutiny were already in the air.

Just at that highly critical moment, Lady Luck smiled on us. Our months of effort finally produced some result. Mr. Lugg had managed to locate and contact a capable, honest-to-god Sangoma, probably the very last true survivor of that once numerous, influential profession. The only fly in the ointment, reported an otherwise jubilant messenger, was that this Sangoma, before coming to us, had to complete various urgent cures and conjurations. There was also the matter of the moon. It appeared that only with the moon in a certain position, could Zizwezonke Mtetwa have the full use of all his extraordinary talents, skills and powers. In other words, elated and relieved as we were, we had to face the fact that we had to wait three more weeks—and like it.

A brief conference with Ellen, Mr. Lugg and all our technicians produced the unanimous conclusion that suspending work for that long was out of the question. Our team-work had steadily improved and had reached such a pitch, that to take full advantage of it, we had to go ahead at full speed. It was even more serious with our Zulus. The postponement of the work at the Place of Snakes, as much as the news that Mtetwa was to come, had suddenly revived in them their usual good spirits. Sure as they were of abundant daily food, generous pay and frequent presents, they had become resigned to our endless hurrying about, to our crazy-sounding instructions, to our broiling lights and reflectors. To keep them for twenty-one days doing nothing, would have been terribly costly for us and even more ruinous to their morale. To let them go, asking them to return in three weeks, wouldn't be fair to them, and far less to us, as half of them would disappear for good.

Fortunately, a careful examination of the script proved that none of the scenes that depended on the Sangoma or demanded his supervision, required the presence, at any given time, of more than one or the other of three of our main characters. The remaining principals, the battalions of extras, and the huge kraal we had so laboriously built in our clearing, would not be needed.

As we had already recorded, to our full satisfaction, a great many difficult, intricate aspects of Zulu life, including rituals which were as secret in name as they were in fact (such as the "Virgins' Python

Dance of Initiation" which had never before been witnessed, far less photographed, by an outsider), we decided that the time had come to grapple immediately with the crowd sequences with which the film was to culminate.

These included such potentially explosive ceremonies as the Trial By Smell, the Test By Burning Water and the agonizing torment of the Tree of Torture. All these barbaric rites, common in ancient times, were still practised, every now and then, but only in some very isolated witchdoctor's kraal—mostly at night, and always in the greatest secrecy, because they had long since been severely prohibited by the white authorities. No Zulu chief would tolerate them, either, as these ceremonies usually ended with bloody fights and many deaths.

The essence of the Trial By Smell ceremony is that the Zulus unshakably believe that a guilty man, afraid of being discovered, will sweat with fear, throughout the long, feverish examination session, much more than anybody else—and will thereby give himself away. And, strangely enough, judging by the confessions made, through the years, after such ceremonies, it is true that this method of pin-pointing guilt comes close to being 100% accurate—except of course when (as in the case of Sashelo's picking upon Siliva) the Witchdoctor of Smell has made up his mind before starting. Then the whole thing becomes nothing but a safe, if crooked, means for satisfying a personal grudge—and the hundreds of participants become innocent accomplices in the success of his dirty plot.

Whether the ceremony has been conducted properly, or whether it has been as "rigged" as some American TV quiz-programmes have been in the recent past, the Test By Burning Water usually follows. This is a sort of primitive court of appeal, devised to supply either a confirmation of the guilt of the man selected—or a proof that he is innocent after all, and that the witchdoctor for once has been wrong.

Having one's left hand plunged rapidly into a cauldron of boiling water might seem a slightly drastic and dangerous way for the poor devil to try to establish his innocence. But there is a gimmick which gives to the whole business an element of fairness, as well as of

barbarism. With the lightning quickness of a magician, the witch-doctor, while distracting the attention of all who are present, manages to cover the left hand of the suspect with a secret medicine, which will protect the hand during its brief immersion in the boiling water. Here again the excessive sweat of fear is expected to play its role, by counteracting and cancelling the effect of the medicine. Thus a man who is guilty (or one who has not sufficient self-control) will perspire profusely, and his hand will be badly scalded.

Naturally, in the case of our bioscope story, Sashelo conveniently forgets to apply the secret medicine. And so Siliva, twice proven guilty, is instantly condemned to death. The enraged crowd of warriors thrust, shove him towards the skeleton-like, ancient Tree of Torture. There he is tied against the rough hoary, trunk (it was a genuine Tree of Torture, which we had discovered in a far kraal and transplanted to our clearing), to undergo the endlessly slow torture by spears, which, at intervals, pierce his chest, deeply enough to draw plenty of blood, but never so deeply as to make the "entertainment" end too soon.

Needless to say, these crowd scenes gave us many a tense, harrowing moment. There were times when Mr. Lugg's great prestige with the Zulus, the continuous vociferous interventions of Chief Biyela, and the combined efforts of myself and all my men (and of Dube, for once mixed up in the crowd, with all a warrior's regalia, in order the quicker to translate my urgent orders on the spot) were barely enough to keep under control the hundreds of frenzied warriors who participated in these spectacular highlights of the picture. On these occasions, it was no longer a matter of dealing with poker-faced Zulus, who prided themselves on keeping their features as expressionless as eggs. Eggs, my foot!—they plunged so wholeheartedly into the spirit of the thing thoroughly, so forgot the fiction of what they were doing, that it was a real miracle that we managed to complete all these scenes without any serious accident.

As for Siliva, since the multiple-mother epidemic had stopped, he was a transformed man. The unexpected presents given to his father and his six surviving mothers had brought him prestige.

The whole countryside had seen and admired him being driven home, and then back to our camp, in one of our jeeps—the Zulu equivalent of our limousine and chauffeur, V.I.P. treatment. Above all, having come to the conclusion that he was being treated in a kind and just manner, he had visibly thawed, become more alert and eager to please me. The better he did, the more *banzela* and compliments he naturally received and the more important he became in the eyes of the other Zulus. Presently, he reached the stage of grasping, at once, everything I attempted to put over to him, and of translating my often clumsy gestures into such graceful movements and convincing expressions, as to leave all watchers breathless—myself included.

This became particularly evident when Siliva had to meet his first "bitter spears", a serious test the physical danger of which we could only partially blunt. There, in the midst of the wildly milling, madly yelling crowd, he was simply superb. He took his part so seriously that, at a point when he had to look semi-unconscious, he actually fainted; and it took all the silvery jingling of a very special *banzela* to bring him to, barely in time for the picture's grand finale.

Then, when the miraculously-revived Royal Chief entered the clearing at the head of his guards; when, with one mighty bellow he stopped the proceedings and, with another, ordered Sashelo and Twabeni arrested and the youth freed from the tree and brought to his feet, Siliva lay on the ground, as limp and lifeless as if he had actually lost pints of blood, as if his tortured chest had really been covered with blood—instead of with tomato ketchup.

When his bioscope fiancée ran to his side, held up his head and tenderly caressed his face, Siliva gave us some startlingly touching, magnificently "natural" action. Nobody could have guessed the existence of that long-standing, mutual dislike which the two of them had felt until then.

On her side, Princess Mdabuli, already quite mellowed since her escapade with Bejana, was either carried away by Siliva's brilliant performance, or hypnotized by the fat *banzela* she now realized was soon to be hers. For once, she co-operated a hundred per cent. When, at a final bellow from the Royal Chief, the guards spread out to set fire to every hut in the clearing, Mdabuli bent over Siliva,

lavishing on him all the tender smiles and loving gestures which I had tried to show her—plus some quite effective ones of her own.

As the punitive flames made a roaring inferno of the clearing and the chastised warriors swung into the *inkondhlo* national song, almost everybody was happy. To the Royal Chief, to the warriors, to the dwarf, to the women, the girls and the children, it meant finally receiving their full pay, an incredible amount of *malini* which for so long had seemed only a tantalizing dream—and the prospect of doing no more work of any kind until the last shilling was spent. To Ellen, myself, our companions of the expedition and Mr. Lugg, it meant a successful conclusion to the penultimate chapter of a long serial of—fun, yes; but also of one of the most tremendous headaches of all of our lives.

The only exceptions to the general elation were Siliva, Twabeni and Sashelo, who knew they would have to remain behind (and to wait for their *malini*) for a few more days, until the completion of the work with the Sangoma. The most mournful of the three was poor Sashelo. Believe me, he wasn't worrying about the future, this time, nor about what he would soon have to do in unpleasantly close proximity to snakes. The present was sufficient to make him miserable. Standing sadly apart from all the others, he watched, with dismayed, unbelieving eyes, the inexorable flames as they devoured and destroyed big huts and small huts, valuable props, granaries and enclosures for cattle—all that costly, beautiful kraal which he had grown to feel was not of the bioscope, but his very own.

ZIZWEZONKE MTETWA

THE majestic eucalypti, which stood guard all around our little kingdom, showed great yellow patches where the tall flames had licked and scorched their great manes of perfumed leaves. The whole clearing was still permeated by the acrid smell, left by the pouring of water over masses of burning dry grass and still green saplings. In the silence left behind by the now vanished big crowd of Zulus, feeble hisses of steam, here and there, mocked at us from the soggy remains of once-beautiful huts.

Three days had passed since the great fire, two since almost everybody had been paid off and sent home by a shuttle-service of large, packed full trucks. The distaff side was no longer represented in camp. Ellen had been ordered by Prof. Molland to go to Durban to complete her convalescence in absolute quiet. All the Zulu girls and women had been returned to their kraals. The mother of Matata and Zee-po was still in the cooler. Even the Witchdoctress Of Love (Sashelo's head wife) had departed, to do a bit of checking on Sashelo's other wives, the ten who had remained in that beautiful kraal which was actually his own.

Yesterday we had also emptied the "studio" of all our junk, props and machinery. The whole place had been cleaned up and the heavy chairs of the coloureds brought back. On the stage, five young men of different coloured skins, ranging from almost-white to almost black, were now rehearsing for a dance which was to take place soon. They played a piece. They played it again, from beginning to end. Then again, and again—always the same tune—until we felt persecuted by it. Our cooks and boys and the few actors left behind, as well as ourselves, were humming, whistling and "singing" that confounded all-pervading tune.

Moreover, we had nothing to be particularly merry about. It was the day the Sangoma had promised to be with us. But what if he didn't show up? Supposing that he had changed his mind? Or that, with the Zulu's characteristic contempt for time, he had simply forgotten the whole thing? Or that he thought, perhaps, that he was not due for another couple of months?

He didn't know that, if he failed to appear, he would leave me out on a limb—the worst limb of my life. With some 220,000 dollars invested in the project, and after months and months of devilish hard work, there I was, with some commercials and educational films completed—but with the big picture, which had taken most of our efforts and our money, so incomplete (just for lack of a few key sequences) as to be probably worth nothing. True, to be fair, it had been my own stubbornness as much as anything else which had pushed me so far out on that limb; but, compared with it, the limb which stretched out above the Place of Snakes now seemed to me like a bed of roses.

"Has he come?" Ellen anxiously asked over the telephone from Durban.

"Will he come?" one or other of my men asked me every few minutes.

"If he doesn't . . ." started Mr. Lugg. Then he began chewing his short, peppery moustaches again.

"Of course, he's coming," I continued to answer. I was speaking more to myself than to the others—with the same firmness I had used more than once, inside myself, while waiting for the little magic ball in Monte Carlo to stop, say, on number twenty-seven, the number on which I had stacked my last chips of the evening. (Well, on one occasion it *did* stop there!)

We were killing time with desultory talk in my trailer-office, I sitting in front of the window which dominated the entire, almost-deserted, camp. There was some half-hearted activity going on round the photo-cine laboratories, the kitchens, and the commissary tent, where an assistant cook was handing some huge sandwiches to Siliva and Sashelo—two silent, depressed, almost immobile figures.

The faithful coloureds were still rehearsing their piece. I couldn't

help but think how thrilling the dance would be, when it took place, if that was the musician's only stock in trade. Unexpectedly, the tune was abruptly chopped in the middle of a phrase. Opposite the studio, the clattering of pots and pans ceased at the same time. Cooks, assistant cooks and boys stopped what they were doing and turned their heads, with one accord, towards the path which led from the road into our camp. Sashelo and Siliva did the same, even halting their noisy chewing. In the sudden silence, we, too, looked towards the path. It was empty. But not for long (and I never have understood what had warned the coloureds and our Zulus, so many seconds before anything could be seen).

A disreputable figure appeared, looking neither to the right nor to the left, but straight at my trailer window. He was a tall, thin man, wrapped in a dilapidated, ex-military coat much too large for him. His feet were covered with dried mud. His face was mostly hidden by an old, battered too large hat. Walking in single file behind him, were two young girls, both swathed in several blankets from the chin down, and each carrying a wooden box balanced on her head. The box of the second, and younger one, was obviously heavy. The box of the other was not so large, certainly lighter and perforated with holes.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "If that poor specimen is the famous Sangoma, we're finished." Just then, I vaguely noticed, the coloureds started on their piece again, exactly where they had left off.

"That box on the head of the first girl—the plump one," said one of my men, "is for snakes, I'll bet."

"And the other box contains the Sangoma's paraphernalia," said Mr. Lugg, "and his regalia. Don't get discouraged—not until you have talked with him, at least."

Of course, Mr. Lugg was perfectly right. That Sangoma, I later learned, could not read or write his own language. He didn't know more than six or seven words of English. He didn't have much of an idea about anything that went on in the world outside Zululand. But, if I had thought that he was just a dirty, ignorant, primitive savage, I was certainly wrong. Even as I went out of the trailer to shake his hand, I quickly revised my first impression.

Hidden though it was by that tent of a coat, his figure appeared to be straight, dignified and somehow imposing. His movements were swift, elastic, and yet courtly. His alert, ascetic face expressed a great deal of intelligence. His dark, burning, hypnotic eyes reflected a wisdom that only many generations of dedicated ancestors could have gathered, concentrated and passed down to him.

The moment Zizwezonke Mtetwa began to speak, I felt strongly that the Sangoma, by so many of our standards a poor, illiterate, uneducated Zulu, might very well possess a practical knowledge of his subject superior to that of half a dozen of our best scientists put together. Listening to him, it became easy to believe all he said with such noble simplicity, and Mr. Lugg translated sentence by sentence, often emphasizing one with a nod of tacit confirmation.

In short, the Sangoma claimed always to know where to find snakes, even in the darkness of night. When he "called" them, they would come and he would pick them up with his bare hands. Within days, these snakes would get to know him, become his friends, and very seldom would they strike at him again—after the first few hours.

I asked him what he did about these bites. "Nothing," he replied. He had received so many, that by now he was almost immune. What little danger remained, he said, was safely counteracted by his chewing and swallowing, every new moon, the freshly-extracted fangs, still dripping with poison, of one of each of Zululand's most venomous snakes—which he had captured for that purpose. Only on exceptional occasions did he have to use on himself a powder, which he carried with him to rub into the bites of natives who called him in cases they couldn't handle themselves. Another thing which I found more than interesting was the Sangoma's unassuming statement that he often used pills containing cobra's venom to treat epilepsy and other serious maladies—just what his forbears had done for hundreds of years (and just what I had read that our scientists were only now beginning to experiment with).

I returned to snake bites. Could he always cure them with his "powder"? Yes, he repeated; and painlessly, too, if only he was

called in time. But, he added, most cases of snake bite could be easily avoided, to begin with.

"Wait a minute," I said. And I briefly told him of my experience of so many years before.

"No, *Cummandà*," he insisted. "There was no need for you to be bitten, either."

As he spoke, I noticed with interest that instead of *Nkosi*, as all Zulus addressed me, he called me *Cummandà*, evidently his own pronunciation of my old, World War One, rank of commander which somebody must have told him about. I asked him what he meant by that "no need". Smiling, he said that, if I had been more prudent or expert, I would not have stepped on that cobra of long ago (which was perfectly correct), and that the cobra had struck me only in self-defence. Had I stopped before my foot touched the cobra, had I stood immobile without exuding fear or making any of those unconscious movements which fear often dictates, nothing would have happened to me. Now, he went on, years had made that fear, increased a hundredfold by what I had suffered then, grow into my present dread. But if I so wished, he would destroy this dread entirely. Perhaps (and Mr. Lugg swallowed hard before translating this bit), he could even change my repulsion for reptiles into a liking for them.

That I wanted to see!

Calmly, the Sangoma extracted from somewhere under his heavy coat a large puff-adder. He held it just under the vicious-looking, triangular head, compelling its mouth to open and the deadly fangs to be revealed. Beads of venom were already forming on them. We all stepped backward, while our Zulus, who had gathered around in awed silence, scattered at top speed, in sheer panic. Instantly, the adder felt the atmosphere of fright and began to twist about, desperately trying to get free. "Touch it," the Sangoma said to me. "It is not so horribly slimy and clammy as you believe."

I did, though most reluctantly—and I was surprised to find that he was absolutely right.

"We all fear what we do not understand," said the Sangoma. "If you so wish, I will help you to understand snakes. But now,

with your permission, *Cummandà*; I would like to go and wash, and find something to eat for my friends."

The talk had been so absorbing that only when the Sangoma turned to give an order, and two bundles of blankets stood up and moved, did we remember the two girls who had followed him into the clearing. As the elder of the girls approached him, the Sangoma opened the lid of her box, the perforated wooden case. Out of it rose six or seven hissing heads, each darting out a flickering, forked tongue. Mtetwa* casually slapped them back, threw in the puff-adder, closed the lid and, followed by his silent retinue, started for the big tent which I pointed out to him and told him was reserved for his use.

Doubtfully, I glanced at my fingers which, for the first time in my life, had more or less willingly touched a snake—one of the most dangerously poisonous snakes in existence—and practically caressed it! Hurriedly, before joining the others for lunch, I went back to my trailer, to scrub my hands well, with boiling water, a hard brush and carbolic soap. Only then did I notice again the band of the coloureds. It was still going strong, still worrying at the same piece of music. For, since the Sangoma's arrival, my ears had completely ignored that haunting tune.

* It was not correct for me to refer to the Sangoma as "Mtetwa", this being the name of his people, not his own. It was as if somebody had called me "American!" On the other hand there were times when I didn't feel like calling him Sangoma. And Zizwezonzke was simply too much of a tongue-twister; try pronouncing it aloud, and you will agree.

THE SANGOMA

THROUGHOUT my many African years, I had always found myself able to pick up at least the essentials of any language or dialect, white or black, in a few days or a few weeks. Nothing particularly grammatical or fancy, but amply enough to understand what was said to me and to make myself understood. The same had happened during my first visit to Zululand. But in thirty-four years I had forgotten more than I had ever learned. And now I was older and less ambitious, I guess and I was already absorbed by a great many other more pressing problems. Of course, I had re-learned the words for: "yes", "no", "quick" (*putuma*), "work", "rest", "good", "bad", "make it snappy" (*putuma*), as well as various salutations, exclamations and commands—such as "shake a leg" (*putuma*), "wake up" (*putuma*) or "get cracking" (*putuma*). On their side, our Zulus had learned the significance of the ubiquitous "Okay", of "Camera!", "Cut!", and even of *papaluka*, a word I believe I had made up myself, to mean damned fool, stupid idiot, imbecile, etc.—a word, in fact, which was frequently useful.

But, when it came to sustained conversation, I just had to fall back on Mr. Lugg or Dube. That wasn't a simple matter, however. For, Mr. Lugg, knowing Zulu so well and liking nothing better than to use it, would usually expand a ten-word question of mine into a ten-minute dissertation. This was of the utmost interest to the Zulus, I am sure. But it was also most disconcerting to me, since I was left to twiddle thumbs, while I desperately tried to cling on to the train of my thoughts.

With Dube, the opposite was true. He knew English pretty well, but he was not exactly on a par with those multitudinous

United Nations instant-translators. So, his natural tendency was to listen for several minutes to a speech addressed to me in Zulu, then to condense it, for my benefit, into two or three short English sentences. For instance, here is (with the help of my inseparable tape recorder) an invocation which, an old man explained to me, was used by a certain Langalake Ngoobo, when addressing the spirits of his predecessors, his tribe's former chiefs.

It went like this:

*Okuhle, okumhlope, siyacela.
Sicela ukupila, umoya omuhle.
Nisibheke njalo Makosi.
Kukule nabantwana,
Sitole ukudhla nempahla,
Inkonzo enhle nakwa ba mhlope.
Basi pate kahle njengoba besi pete.
Ngitsho kuwena Nonyanda omnyama,
Wena gumbu, lwa magwala,
Hlangabeza qoqo lizayo.
Ngitsho kuwena Mahawule, nkundhla zibomvu,
Godide, Nontshantsha,
Ngitsho kuwena Madhlenya, ondhlebe zinde nhenge ndhlovu,
Indosa ebomvu ebonwa abavuki bo kusa.
Ngitsho kuwena Hemuhemu,
Isigoloza esimehlo abomvu,
Esibhek' amadoda angati siwa jamele,
uMandindizela ongati izulu elidumayo.*

"Wonderful," I nodded to Dube. "It sounds very good. But, what in the hell does it all mean?"

Scratching his head, while he giggled with some embarrassment, Dube said, "It asks for purity and protection. It says that the whites have ruled justly . . ." Then out of the corner of his eye, he caught sight of Mtetwa, who was, almost absent-mindedly, pulling a cobra from the box of snakes. Immediately, Dube jumped several steps backwards. "It—it—it is an invocation to the spirits," he concluded lamely. And that was all I was able to get out of him—while he retreated even further.

Some time later, Mr. Lugg very kindly wrote down for me the correct translation of that address to the spirits of the former chiefs of Langalake's tribe. And, just to give an idea of the inadequacy of Dube's version, I include it here:

Goodness and purity, for these we ask,
We ask for health and happiness.
Protect us for ever Makosi,
That our children may grow, and that we may
 have food and wealth,
That we may be law-abiding to the whites,
And that they may continue to rule us justly, as
 hitherto.
I appeal to you, Nonyanda, the black one.
You, the musician for denouncing cowards,
Brave and mighty warrior ever ready for the foe.
I appeal to you, Mahawule, alias Godide, alias
 Nontshantsha,
With a home noted for its hospitality.
I appeal to you, Madhlenya, with the long ears of
 an elephant,
You, the morning star, seen by early risers.
I appeal to you, Hemuhemu,
Whose gaze is like the blood-red glare fixed upon
 a multitude,
Whose speech is like the thunder from the sky.

This situation became particularly embarrassing when we were about to start work with the Sangoma. First of all, it was important that he understood fully what we expected from him, the exact action with snakes and from snakes which I needed for our film. Nobody could explain this more clearly and authoritatively than Mr. Lugg. I described it to him in exactly eight short sentences. Then I sat down to watch the fun and smoke a couple of king-size cigarettes, while Mr. Lugg, beautifully and beatifically, expanded those eight sentences into eight chapters or so. At the end, the Sangoma looked a bit dizzy, but fully agreeable. Mr. Lugg,

imperturbable as ever, looked at his watch and said it was time for him to go home for dinner.

But there was also a great deal of information that I wanted to get from the Sangoma. For the longer, more ordinary kind of conversation I had in mind, I decided that my best bet was to rely entirely on Dube, also because he could be with us the whole time. But everything would be spoiled if my very elegant interpreter continued the bad habit demonstrated above by his "translation" of the Langalake's invocation. So, after some forceful discussion, I persuaded him that, from then on, whether I was speaking, or the Sangoma, he should translate *one* sentence at a time.

On the whole, this system worked out pretty well for the two weeks and a half that the Sangoma was with us. The only complication was that every time a snake appeared (which was practically all the time) Dube would leap a few feet in the opposite direction and immovably stay there, at a safe distance, entirely impervious to my hearty "*papaluka!*" This constant terror of snakes on his part caused some strain on the vocal chords of all three of us. But we managed, somehow; and I kept Mr. Lugg in reserve, as my Big Bertha, bothering him only in the few emergencies which were too complicated for Dube to handle.

One of these special occasions turned up when I tried to get from Zizwezonke Mtetwa at least the essentials of his life story. Simple and straightforward as his answers were, Dube couldn't cope with them. For Mr. Lugg, on the other hand, it was child's play. He sat down at a camp table in the shade, and kindly typed down a careful translation into English of the story that the Sangoma, sitting on a bench before him, recounted to him.

Here it is:

"Zizwezonke Mtetwa, the Sangoma, tells his story:

"My paternal grandfather was the late Chief Matshwili Mtetwa, killed during the Bambata Rebellion in 1906*, and he in turn was a grandson of the celebrated Mtetwa King Dingiswayo, who laid the

* 1906, 1918 and 1946 were years worked out by Mr. Lugg in some elaborate way of his own, as the Sangoma of course didn't refer to these, or other years, by number, but by quoting events which allowed Mr. Lugg to fix the dates.

foundations upon which his general, the great Shaka, later built the Zulu nation. Thus, it will be seen that I am a lineal descendant of Dingiswayo's.

"I was born in 1918, and live on a ridge overlooking the Tugela river about fifty miles from here, under a chief of the Zulu clan.

"We Mtetwa people are of Tonga stock, and consequently do not belong to that branch of the Nguni family which includes the Zulus and their kindred clans. As a tribe, the Mtetwa have always been famous for their Sangomas or *amadalakonke* (the creators of everything), as they are often referred to, whose assistance and advice is sought from far and wide.

"Although I am not a licensed medicine man, I am recognized by my people as a qualified Sangoma and snake charmer. I am anxious to secure a licence, as I am not supposed to practise as a medicine man without one, but so far I have been unsuccessful, as the Government is restricting the activities of Natives engaged in this profession. I am about to renew my application.*

"As I am anxious that my children and their descendants should know how I came by my calling, I wish to record the circumstances under which this came about.

"Before a man or woman can become a Sangoma, he or she must pass through a process of initiation or apprenticeship, known as *ukwethwasa*. At the outset, the novice is afflicted with a peculiar malady or 'sickness'. He becomes possessed of a spirit, and it must be clearly understood that only those who become so afflicted may qualify as diviners. In some cases the cause of the 'illness' can be detected by the patient; in others only by a medicine man or a Sangoma. In my case, I diagnosed it myself.

"It is a hard and difficult course. With me, an elder brother was taken ill, but died without qualifying. He was followed by another brother. He also died, despite having gone to a European hospital for treatment. Then my turn came. It took the form of dreams or visions. In one of these I saw myself sitting, partly submerged in a pool of water like a duck, and I was seized with an urge to immerse myself in water—an urge with which I

* After hearing what we had to say about the Sangoma, the Magistrate granted him the licence at once.

frequently complied. About the same time I developed a sore on my penis, and I found that the only way to alleviate the pain was to immerse myself in water. Eventually the sore disappeared, but appeared again later. Continuance of the water treatment eventually effected a cure.

"Still I was far from well, and in my dreams I saw many snakes, the sight of which also developed an urge to hunt and capture them. It was one which I could not resist, and I was impelled to seek them out of their hiding-places and to capture them. To improve my health I cooked and ate one, and derived considerable benefit from doing so.

"On one occasion, when attempting to capture a green mamba—one of the variety that changes colour from green to a shade of copper brown it bit me and I got very ill, with burning pains across my chest. I treated myself, with a mixture of whey and a brew made from the leaves of the *mqagongo*;^{*} and recovered.

"In one dream, I was instructed by the Unseen to remove my foreskin as it was causing ill-health. I did do, by cutting it off with a knife the next morning, and immediately my health began to improve.

"In this connection I wish to record that, in early times, circumcision was practised by most tribes in Zululand, including our own, and that the custom was only dropped when Shaka prohibited its further observance. It is still followed by many Natives living in the Cape Province.

"It is the custom for most novices to serve their period of probation under the guidance of a qualified Sangoma, but I have never done so. I have acquired all my information and knowledge by second sight. I get an idea—a sort of message—which I receive at times, even when awake. When I was bitten by the green mamba, the use of whey and *mqagongo* simply came to me—I do not know from where, for such a mixture is not in common use.

"On occasions, when sick people have been on their way to consult me, I have been afflicted with their complaints, and in consequence have had full knowledge of their sufferings by the time they reach me. The names of trees and herbs I have had to study and

^{*} The *clerodendron* tree.

acquire but, apart from this, all my knowledge has come to me in a supernatural way.

"Early in 1946, Mdlambe, the daughter of Magemfana, one of our local headmen, expressed a wish to visit the home of her intended husband, but I had received a 'message', warning her not to do so, as she would meet with an untimely end. I warned her accordingly, but my words were treated with scorn and I was regarded as a lunatic. On reaching the kraal, she died suddenly without having shown any signs of illness.

"Shortly after this incident, I received another 'message'. It concerned a young man named Mgungundlovu, of our neighbourhood, who was then working in Johannesburg. He had killed a native in a quarrel, and I received a warning from the dead man's spirit, that he was bent on having his revenge. I warned Mgungundlovu's people, and advised them to slaughter a beast to appease the spirit and to anoint Mgungundlovu with the gall, but went unheeded. Shortly after Mgungundlovu's return to Zululand he attended a wedding and on the way home got involved in a fight and was killed.

"After these happenings, people realized that I possessed supernatural powers, and began to seek my advice. Among many other things, I have had occasion to treat a number of married women for sterility, and have been successful with all.

"Now, although still unlicensed, I am regarded as a fully qualified medicine man by my people.

"As a snake charmer I have been bitten once by a green mamba, already referred to, and four times by the large, black variety, numerous times by an *imfezi* or cobra, and many times by the ordinary puff-adder. You will have seen that all my snakes are at present fully-fanged."

Here, in the original, follows the official:

"Statement made to me. H. C. Lugg."

* * *

It is one thing to read the above statement here, in the midst of our civilization and its numberless manifestations but another and entirely different thing, to hear it, in his own language, from that

striking Sangoma, all dressed up in the picturesque regalia of his ancient caste—then read aloud, in clipped English, by that admirable gentleman who, during twenty-five years as Chief Native Commissioner for Zululand, had come to know his wards so well. And, to see the whole picture correctly, one has to try to visualize that this was taking place in a semi-deserted clearing, on the crest of a single "wave" of that immense sea of mountains and hills which, except for superficial human changes, was still the same world as it had been in the primitive, barbaric days of Shaka, the "Napoleon of the South".

THE "UNLICENSED" MEDICINE MAN

BEFORE presenting the Sangoma as Snake Charmer, and before trying to pass on some of the snake lore which I learned from him, I would like to describe an event I witnessed a few days later, which shows the Sangoma as Medicine Man ("although still unlicensed", as he had said in his statement).

As was to be expected, the news of his arrival at our camp had immediately spread all over the countryside. On one morning, soon afterwards, a Zulu by the name of Matumbo rushed into our clearing, doing his best not to show that he was filled with anguish and anxiety. He needed the help of the Sangoma, and in a hurry, too. The latter was prepared to give it but, being in our camp as our guest, and on our pay-roll, he thought he should first ask my permission. When I willingly gave it, the Sangoma said that I must feel free to accompany him and watch everything he did. Of course, I immediately accepted his offer; and off we went, Matumbo carrying several baskets for the Sangoma, and I with Dube at my side.

Here, in brief, is the situation which faced the Sangoma—and how, with almost casual simplicity, he solved the problem it presented.

I knew Matumbo, because he lived in a kraal not far from our camp, and he and his family had worked for us for a while. Being a man of moderate means, he had only three wives. Two were comfortably old, that is they could still do a lot of work for the household, but could no longer bear children. The apple of his eye was Tebeeni, his third wife, young enough to be his daughter. She was pretty, vital, gay; and, only a week or so ago, she had presented him with a wonderful little boy.

Matata, brother of Siliwa, hears
the witchdoctor's advice to
Mdabuli . . .



. . . and runs to tell his brother.





Mdabuli at the "Lovers' Pond".

The "Smell Ceremony", during which Sashelo accuses Siliva.



Only the night before, soon after Matumbo had heard of the arrival of the Sangoma, his Tebeeni had suddenly died—of what sickness he didn't know. It was as shocking to him as if a strong and bright flame had been abruptly snuffed out under his eyes for no apparent reason and with no understandable cause. Hence his rushing to the Sangoma; for now the little copper-coloured boy, deprived of Tebeeni's nursing, was crying hungrily, and refused to be calmed by the soothing voice and the tender caresses of the virgin Satulini—the 14-year old sister of the child's mother. Matumbo, the proud father and bereaved husband, was simply in despair. He felt guilty for not having had a chance to call a medicine man in time to save his wife, And he simply didn't know what to do about the child.

As we approached Matumbo's kraal, I heard the bellowing of several cows who were clamouring to be milked. "Ask him," I told Dube, "why he doesn't give the child some good cows' milk?"

Matumbo looked at me as if I had suggested a devilish brew that would automatically change his beloved child into a calf. "No," he said firmly. "No, *Nkosi*. My child can only be nursed by a member of my family. Otherwise he, too, will die. Or he may grow to be a deformed dwarf!"

The Sangoma nodded. "He is right," he said. "But this will not happen—nor will the child die of starvation. He will prosper and grow to be Matumbo's pride."

Arriving at the kraal, Dube and I stayed behind at a discreet distance, but not so far away as to miss anything of what was going to happen.

The two old wives were called. The Sangoma glanced at them and dismissed them. The virgin Satulini was summoned from the crying baby. She was told to disrobe down to the waist, and then to lie down on the ground, behind a hut which would serve as a screen to hide the proceedings from the rest of the kraal's inhabitants. Matumbo was dispatched to fetch some red-hot coals from the fires in the various huts. The Sangoma arranged the coals and some hot ashes in the way he wanted them and then, from one of his baskets, extracted four, square-shaped but concave, stones, which he

put on the improvised brazier to heat. From another basket, he took, first a handful of nettles, then a small calabash. It contained a thick poultice, which I later learned had been made by boiling a different kind of nettle in a little water, until the mixture had been cooked down to a sticky paste; it looked like glue, or unpurified honey.

The Sangoma knelt beside the virgin. As he began to brush her young, firm, beautifully-shaped breasts with the nettles, he uttered a rapid string of words, which Dube asserted were magic incantations incomprehensible to him. The young girl never moved her lips or batted an eyelid. I do not know whether she was hypnotized, or whether it was that she had such confidence in the manipulations of the Sangoma, but she simply stared at him, quiet and serene.

After a while, he set aside the nettles and gently spread the sticky poultice from the calabash over the girl's breasts, and then covered each of them with two of the heated, concave stones.

Except for the fact that the operation was repeated three times and that, throughout the performance, the Sangoma had continued his flow of incomprehensible words—that was all.

At the end of two hours, what to me had seemed impossible, quite suddenly happened. The flow of words ceased. The stones were removed for good. Satulini seemed to wake up. She rose, serious but happy looking, and executed a few dance steps with another young girl who had just appeared. One of the old wives came with a calabash of hot water and washed Satulini's breasts. The other old wife brought her the starving, crying child. Nonchalantly, *the virgin began to suckle him.*

At the child's rapturous little moans, the Sangoma smiled and nodded approval. He picked up his four stones and his little calabash, received the delirious thanks of Matumbo and of the whole kraal. He handed the baskets to a little boy, motioned him to drive in front of him his "fee"—one of Matumbo's best cows—and we started back to camp.

Incidentally, except perhaps for the stream of magic incantations

(a bit of *mise en scène* probably quite useful as a psychological anaesthetic), there was not the slightest hocus pocus in all this. I later reported what had happened to my French anthropologist friend (the one who had asked me for the masks), who was also a doctor of medicine; and I delivered to him samples of the nettles used for the breast-brushing and of those needed to make the poultice, as well as the stones (which I had managed to obtain from the Sangoma). My friend took the whole thing most seriously, and decided to start experimenting at once. Unfortunately, and to his surprise, in France he couldn't find many virgins willing to volunteer as his guinea pigs. In fact, he couldn't persuade one. So, as the next best thing, he had to content himself with young, yet unmated goats. He got as many as he wanted of these; and, by repeating step by step everything that the Sangoma had done in Matumbo's kraal in Zululand, every time he obtained exactly the same results—which he scientifically described in a learned paper entitled "*Lactatio Serotina*".

This episode had a sequel three days later.

Leaving Mr. Lugg, the Sangoma and my technicians to continue preparations at the Place of Snakes, for the scenes we wanted to shoot there the following day, I went off for a few minutes with Dube, looking for partridges for the mess. When we were nearing Matumbo's kraal, we heard an unusually loud chattering, and went to see what was happening.

We found the members of the family and a large group of visiting neighbours gathered outside a hut, all talking and gesticulating with great animation. We made our way through the crowd and saw what they were all pointing and staring at—a large green mamba which stood coiled, poised to strike, in the very centre of the hut which I knew had been the one inhabited by Tebeeni. As it was such a poisonous snake and looked so angered by the noise and confusion, I at once offered to Matumbo to dispose of it with my shotgun. Dube hesitated, shrugged his shoulders, finally translated my words. Surprisingly, they were answered, not by thanks but by outraged cries.

After obtaining silence with an imperative gesture, Matumbo spoke solemnly. Once more, he almost asked me if I had gone

crazy. "That is the spirit of my dead young wife," he protested. "It has come to see if all is well. We must lead it away; but, gently. And, first, we must show it everything."

I should have known better than to ask how in heaven's name he thought he was going to do that, without somebody being bitten and probably killed. He said that, naturally, he had already sent one of the visitors to call the Sangoma. And what else could he have done? he asked, in the tone of someone being over-patient with a greatly retarded child.

Soon afterwards, the Sangoma arrived. He didn't even have to enquire what it all was about. He just arranged all those present into various little groups, so as to leave wide gaps between one bunch and another, as well as between people and huts. Then he crouched down in front of the low, arched door of Tebzeni's hut, and began to play his magic flute.

But snakes are deaf, I thought. They have no ears nor hearing. I will have more to say about this point in a few pages. But what happened that time (and I saw it with my own eyes) was that the deadly snake stopped showing any sign of anger or fear. Instead, it started to sway rhythmically with the music. In a few seconds, it began to crawl nearer and nearer to the Sangoma. Still playing the flute, Mtetwa slowly got to his feet, took a slow step backward, then another and another. The green mamba followed him obediently, always keeping the same distance from him.

In this manner, they made a tour round the widower—who seemed petrified, but bravely kept smiling, to show how grateful he was for the visit of his dead young wife. Other tours were made round each group of people, to prove to the spirit how extremely well everything was going, in the kraal. Of course, the spirit was allowed to make a special tour of inspection round the virgin, Satulini, who had been left standing alone, holding the little baby to her breast—where he continued to feed, contentedly and greedily. She, like everybody in the groups scattered around her, never moved a muscle, but just followed, with wide-open eyes, the strange march of the Sangoma and the green mamba.

Finally, flute sounds and snake went slowly towards the kraal's

most distant hut, entered the shrubby vegetation beyond it, and vanished. People began to move and talk again. Then the Sangoma came back, alone. Again he received everybody's thanks. Again, before we started back together, he collected his fee—this time only a goat and three chickens.

THE SANGOMA AND THE PUPIL

AS USUAL, it was enough to have started something, for something else to interfere with it. We were all set to start work at the Place of Snakes, when a messenger arrived from Sashelo's kraal, to demand his immediate presence there. Apparently, a quarrel had arisen between his head-wife (the Witchdoctress Of Love) and some of his other ten spouses. This wasn't too great a disappointment to us, because we had noticed that those days of unusual idleness in camp were beginning to tell on Siliva, who was growing restless and moody. So it was just as well to get him back to work, give leave to Sashelo, and switch our plans accordingly.

The next day, we started off, in full force, for a spot which Mr. Lugg had suggested as the right place for Siliva (during his "perilous trip northward") to watch, unseen, the ritual dance of the Sangoma, as well as a sort of initiation of Utanvasile, the Sangoma's pupil.

Once more Mr. Lugg's intimate knowledge of the country paid a dividend. The place was deserted, wild-looking, and simply ideal. It offered a little, secluded, roughly-square, clearing which was enclosed on three sides by thick vegetation—just the kind of vegetation, the Sangoma said, in which it was bound to be easy to find any amount of snakes. The fourth side consisted of a mad confusion of huge boulders. Through them ran the bed of a narrow, twisting rivulet, now dry, and used as a path by wild game—particularly, as recent tracks indicated, by various kinds of gazelle and antelope. Walking along that path,¹ Siliva could not be seen from the small, natural clearing. But, by crouching down between two of the biggest boulders, he could easily observe anything

that went on in the Sangoma's "secret place", without revealing his presence.

Just as the Sangoma had radically changed his appearance when he had dropped that horrible coat and hat, and put on the colourful regalia of his profession, so were his two female assistants transformed, now that they finally emerged from their cocoons of heavy blankets.

The youngest, Velepe, was tomboyish in figure, very quiet, with a head topped by a multitude of short pigtailed which shone with a coat of grease and red ochre. She was some kind of relative of the Sangoma, and had come along essentially to transport his heavy baggage. It was obvious that she was accustomed to snakes and to seeing them handled in the strangest possible ways; but she didn't show the slightest personal interest in the matter.

Utanvasile, on the other hand, was a solid, beautifully-formed girl of about 15 or 16, who seemed to have dedicated her life to learning the Sangoma's profession and to following in his steps. Now that she was properly dressed (or, to be more precise, undressed) her garments consisted of nothing but a transparent, very short skirt, cut as low on the back as possible. She also wore a number of necklaces, bracelets, anklets, and head ornaments, which were made of carved ebony, carved pieces of small, magic horns, and a large quantity of huge fangs extracted from Zululand's most poisonous snakes: on the whole, quite a fetching get-up, considering her good figure and almost perfect breasts—and an enviable one in that hot sun.

Working with Siliva was now a pleasure; glad to have something to do again, he was in the best of humours. Now an old hand at the business, it was easy enough for him to walk along that narrow path, stop at the sound of strange songs, listen with surprise, hesitate a moment, and then bend down to peer between two boulders at what was happening on the other side. As for the necessity that the expressions on his face should alternate between astonishment and repulsion or fear—in the way he had learned from us—he had only to let himself go a bit, and what he saw would take good care of the rest.

Photographing the Sangoma, and sound-recording his scenes

was even simpler. He was extremely quick at grasping what we wanted. In any case, he had only to perform the ritual Dance of The Snakes, exactly as he was accustomed to do it, whenever he felt like it, or whenever "the spirits" moved him.

As soon as all the cameras, mikes, etc. were ready, all I had to tell Mtetwa, through Dube, was approximately where we wanted him to stand, and that he should keep turning as much as he could towards the cameras, but must be sure never to look into them. Even before we asked him to do it, he was forcefully explaining all this to his two assistants.

He made the girls sit on one side, each with a stone in either hand. Utanvasile's stones were much larger than the ones in the small hands of Velepe. These four stones, the rattles on the Sangoma's wrists and ankles, and the vigorous stamping of his feet on the hard ground, were to be all the musical accompaniment he would have for his chanting and dancing as well as for the girls' treble chorus. Yet, their performance was to prove most impressive to all of us; and it will be a long time before I forget that remarkable spectacle and its exquisitely compelling harmony.

As if coming on to a stage, the Sangoma emerged from the bushes, carrying three snakes in each hand and with three more round his neck. As he strode to the spot we had indicated to him, I saw that his live props included cobras, vipers, the two black mambas he had caught to please me a few nights before, and a green mamba which, to my not very expert eyes, looked suspiciously like the one he had enticed away from Matumbo's kraal.

Holding the snakes in his hands by their tails, and letting those around his neck crawl all over his person, wherever they wished, the Sangoma began a chant, which was at once joined by the girls' melodious voices and the staccato beating of the stones in their hands. The tempo of the chant and the chorusing songs, of the stamping of feet, the prattling of rattles and the clapping of stones, increased almost imperceptibly. With it, the acrobatic contortions of the Sangoma's entire body became faster and faster. And so did the wild swinging of the snakes, so shaken by the savage dance that seldom one of them had a chance to coil up in protest for more than a fraction of a second.

Let me repeat: just one man, two girls and nine snakes; two pairs of stones, some rattles, and a deep, strong voice answered by two light, gentle ones—and yet, the dance soon reached such a pitch of frenzy that we could feel the beat of our pulses accelerate almost beyond endurance. And we were all so engrossed and fascinated, that I let a cigarette burn down to my fingers, and one of the cameramen went on pushing the button long after his roll of film had been exhausted.

The Sangoma didn't seem to know fatigue. He was covered with perspiration from head to foot. But he was still going on—more strongly and more quickly than ever. And I had to gesticulate for several minutes before he paid attention to me and consented to stop.

Utanvasile then brought up the box for the snakes, into which the bewildered creatures hurriedly took refuge, with evident relief. Velepe, a piece of cloth in each hand, began to mop the perspiration from the muscular body of the still-wild-looking, only-slightly-panting, Sangoma. Feeling that all the others were probably as tired as I was, simply for having watched Mtetwa, I suggested a rest of an hour or so. But the Sangoma refused. "No, *Nkosi Cummandà*," he said. "It's better that I start now with Utanvasile. As soon as you are ready."

Of course, he knew what he was talking about; considering what he wanted Utanvasile to do with the snakes, it was smart of him to use them while they were still so weary, dulled, confused.

As my men began making ready again the cameras, recorders, reflectors and everything else, the Sangoma and I had a brief talk, with Dube interpreting by the new, cumbersome but effective, one-sentence-at-a-time system. Utanvasile, said the Sangoma in answer to my questions, had had a vision, too, and joined him six or seven moons before. She hadn't learned very much as yet, but she was improving. By being in continuous close contact with him, she was, little by little, absorbing some of his knowledge.

"Does the close contact extend to the night, too?" I asked the Sangoma. "I notice that you make Velepe sleep in another tent, but that Utanvasile stays in yours."

Dube's head jerked slightly at my question. But he managed to

translate it with a straight face and to keep his face just as straight while translating the answer. "He says that his snakes always sleep in the same hut as he does. Now, they sleep in the same tent. That is what makes them know each other so well. The same goes for his pupil."

My only comment was an: "Oh, I see," but, for some reason or other, it shattered the composure of Dube, who fell to the ground in one of his rolling fits of laughter.

"Stop that nonsense," I said to him. "and ask the Sangoma what Utanvasile has so far learned from him. In the field of snake lore, I mean." My first words got Dube dutifully up and to his place, but the next ones sent him into another roaring spin, which the Sangoma watched with a slightly contemptuous, certainly haughty expression.

When I succeeded in getting Dube back on to the job, the Sangoma explained that Utanvasile, as we would ourselves see in a few minutes, had already mastered the way of holding snakes properly and had no repulsion left for them—even to such a point that she could hold the heads of two of the most poisonous snakes in her mouth. "All things which I am going to show you how to do, *Nkosi Cummandà*. As soon as you want me to."

Thanking him, I said that we would begin the following day, as I was most interested to learn all I could about snakes and to do everything possible to overcome the fear I had had for them for so many years. Everything possible, that is, except for that last touch of his; for, frankly, I saw no point in holding snakes' heads between my teeth (apart from what my wife would have to say about such antics, even from Durban!)

We were soon ready; and I knew in advance that once again Siliva would not need much encouragement to show a variety of expressions on his handsome, long since de-egged, face—not with what he was to watch from his ambush between the two boulders.

The snakes, when they were pulled out of their box, were still a bit sluggish, but that short rest seemed to have pumped back into them a fair amount of their usual vitality. Still, Utanvasile took in her stride all that the Sangoma did to her or ordered her to do.

First, three snakes were festooned around her head. Then she

had to pick up two others and to hold their heads, while their long bodies lashed out at her almost naked body. Then she was told to hold these two in her left hand, and with her right hand to pick up a third one. The head of the latter she carefully introduced into her mouth, clutching it with her white teeth, just firmly enough to prevent its retreating. Then the Sangoma took away one of the snakes from her left hand, and told her to put the head of the remaining one into her mouth, too.

"Ugh!" muttered Dube behind me. The performance certainly appeared to be both disgusting and dangerous; but, on the whole, I did not think it was either—meaning, of course, just so long as I didn't have to do it myself. As for the Sangoma and his pupil, snakes after all were their business. And snakes are not slimy and viscid as most people believe; in fact, as I was to learn, they are among the cleanest of animals. As for risk (except for a python, which uses other ways for killing), even the most poisonous snake can't do any harm without opening its mouth wide and bringing into action its fangs. And that was just what they were not permitted to do, with their heads being held first between thumb and forefinger, then between the teeth. It was simply a matter of doing it the right way.

The only hazard was in not holding a snake properly—as Utanvasile did, for perhaps a second, with a green mamba whose head she had just taken out of her mouth. Instantly, it struck the palm of her left hand. Sickening as that lightning bite was to us, it didn't seem to bother Utanvasile much—and the Sangoma even less. She looked at her palm, lifted it to her mouth, sucked out blood and poison, and casually spat them out. Mtetwa finished wrapping another snake around her head. Then, calmly he took a pinch of a blackish powder from one of the horns hanging from his neck, and rubbed the powder hard into the two punctures in the girl's hand.

I stopped work and asked Mtetwa if he could do nothing more for his pupil. He shook his head. The girl had already been bitten once before, he said. And, if she really wanted to continue in her profession, she would be bitten many more times; so she'd better get accustomed to it. At any rate, he added, that powder was quite sufficient to take care of the matter.

I thought of people I had read about, who had *died*, just of shock and fright, when bitten by a non-poisonous snake—and looked at Utanvasile who was obviously no more disturbed than by a mosquito's bite. As, without another glance at her left hand, she went to sit and chat with Velepe, the Sangoma explained that the powder was made from the poison glands of puff-adders, dried, ground up, and mixed with sour milk. He also carried with him, in different horns, assorted mixtures made from the glands of other snakes. Some of these, he assured me, effected wonderful cures for a great many illnesses, some of which Dube translated as bronchitis and pneumonia, leprosy and typhus, neuralgia and sciatica.

The following day, Mr. Lugg confirmed that medicine men had used these remedies for centuries. The Zulus had absolute faith in them. Some of these concoctions had even been studied, in relation to their effects on such illnesses, by the Native Medicine Branch of Johannesburg's Witwatersrand University. Personally, however, both Mr. Lugg and I were damned glad that we didn't have to experiment, ourselves, with this pharmacopoeia of the veld.

LEARNING FROM THE SANGOMA

AT LONG last, Siliva's work was completed. A jeep was ready to take him home with all the *banzela* promised to his father and to each of his surviving wives, who had behaved in such a ladylike way as not to afflict us with another sickness. We parted with cordial, almost affectionate, exchanges of thanks and salutations, topped by more than one final *Salakahle* and *Hambakahle*.

For a change, our next, and last, "victim" was late. But who could blame Sashelo for delaying a few days? Have you ever tried bringing peace, presents and pleasure to eleven wives, all of them quite young, lively and demanding? It seemed that, especially after a long separation from ten of them, such a task took some time—even in Zululand.

For once, however, we didn't mind waiting. We had the Sangoma. We had Utanvasile (his pupil, etcetera). We had practically all the snakes in the world. For, whenever we needed a few more, or some of a different species, the Sangoma would go out, search for them and, in a short time, bring them back. Whenever the sun was good, we took full advantage of this unique, long-awaited opportunity, to shoot hundreds of stills and thousands of feet of this unusual cast, in action.

The rest of the time, to the intense amusement of everybody in camp, I spent in getting the instruction and the training which the Sangoma had undertaken to give me. As long as his teaching remained theoretical, Dube stayed within a reasonable distance, as fascinated as I was by what the Sangoma had to say. The moment it became practical and snakes were produced, Dube and any other watcher—black or white—continued to be highly entertained, but

hastily took a good many paces backwards. When, in the course of some demonstration, the Sangoma let a snake loose, the speed with which everybody rushed out of the clearing was something that had to be seen to be believed.

Even though it is my impression that most people are repelled by snakes, at least as much as I was until the start of these lessons, so much interesting information emerged from them that I honestly feel it would be worth sharing some of it with the reader. On the other hand, anybody who simply cannot even stomach talk about snakes, would perhaps be better off if he skipped the rest of this chapter.

One of the first points that the Sangoma impressed upon me was that he was not advocating that anyone should take snakes lightly. On the contrary; potentially deadly as the poisonous ones are, they should be considered with due respect. But also, and above all, they should be regarded as most interesting, even *attractive*. As a matter of fact, the more I became familiar with them, the better did I get to notice and to admire the jewel-like beauty of their eyes, and the varied, gorgeous patterns of colour on their iridescent skins.

Their somatic peculiarities, as explained and demonstrated by a "maestro" like the Sangoma, seemed to me even stranger and more startling than the many fables which humanity has concocted, and believed in, because of its longstanding aversion for reptiles. The number and variety of these tales, incidentally, is not so surprising if one thinks that the Age of Reptiles flourished for some hundred and twenty million years, ending about seventy million years ago. It doesn't seem an exaggeration, therefore, to say that snakes, being among the relatively few survivors of that age, could probably claim the distinction of being the creatures that have been most feared and hated by most of the earth's inhabitants, for most of their existence.

To begin with, practically all animals, man included, perceive external objects by means of impressions made on certain organs of the body through a sort of common denominator—the five senses which we call sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch. When considering snakes, most of our usual conceptions of these five

senses become confused and complicated by the presence of some entirely different apparatus, which is a real marvel in itself.

Snakes, for instance, have fairly good sight, but it is far from being well-adjusted for distance as ours is. And their eyes have no movable eyelids; hence they never shut. In sleep, all that happens is that the pupil contracts somewhat, and the muscles controlling the eyeball relax. Yet some snakes see very well at night.

Not having ear orifices, they do not hear the way we do. I believe that the scientific explanation for their method of hearing is that the entire body picks up vibrations and reverberations of sound through contact with the ground. Rightly or wrongly, the Sangoma had other ideas, too. He assured me that snakes also had some extra means of perceiving sounds, which white experts didn't recognize only because they didn't know about it. He went a step further. By this unknown method, he said, snakes registered, with the utmost precision and swiftness, not only the sounds usually heard by the human ear, but also others that we missed entirely.

Two small experiments we repeatedly made, always with similar results, do seem to support this theory of his. One was an experiment made by the Sangoma's flute-playing. I had always heard that an Indian fakir, for example, used music purely for its effect on the audience, while he actually charmed his snakes by the swaying of his body. However, when playing his flute, the Sangoma did not sway a bit. Yet his piercing notes would make the snake sway in perfect rhythm with them. Not only, but usually, after half an hour or so of this treatment, a newly-located snake would become another of his "friends".

The other experiment we tried several times was one we made with an ultra-sonic whistle I had with me. When its regulator was turned to minimum, even I could hear the feeble noise it made when I blew hard. When turned to medium pitch, we could hear nothing; but, at the other end of the clearing. Matata's big dog would lift its head, point its ears in our direction and, if the whistle was repeated, trot inquiringly toward us, evidently anxious to discover the source of that sound which was inaudible to us. When the whistle was turned to its maximum pitch, the dog never moved, obviously hearing no more than we did, which

is to say, nothing; but any snake in the Sangoma's hands or even in the wooden box, would at once become agitated and coil up as if ready to strike, with its tongue frantically flicking out and always aimed at the place from which I blew the whistle. What caused these curious reactions in the snakes, I am frankly unable to say. But I have no doubt that the Sangoma knew what he was talking about, and that, some day, somebody will find a fully satisfactory explanation of this phenomenon.

Something which combines (and, in some way, mixes together) refined versions of all our five senses (together, perhaps, with some other sense which we haven't as yet defined), is present in the small pits that the large, most poisonous family of vipers has between eyes and nostrils, and in the long forked tongue, which flicks almost continuously out of the mouths of all snakes. This seldom-resting tongue, though contributing to the revulsion that most people feel for snakes, is of course completely harmless. But it is a wonderful "feeler" (an organ of touch) as well as a "smeller". Not that it can smell in itself, but it supplements the sensations that the snake receives through the nostrils, by continuously bringing odorous particles into contact with the smell-sensitive organs, which lie inside its mouth.

As for the vipers' pits, they are a marvellous built-in infra-red ray system. It is so extremely sensitive to heat that, even in complete darkness (and with eyes bandaged, as the Sangoma showed), a viper will, by the use of these pits alone, detect and locate even the smallest warm-blooded prey, and unmerringly strike at it. In other words, this exquisite "snooperscope" of nature represents a true separate sense, which complements, and at times even replaces, the others.

The majority of animals, including most reptiles and amphibians, have legs for moving around. Being limbless, a snake advances (often at a speed which—especially if it is coming straight at you—is absolutely frightening) by methods of locomotion which, to a layman like me, were another marvel; methods which, by the way, made clearly understandable the way which the Sangoma was to teach me to handle a snake—a trick which I will come to in a moment.

Sukumbana, the faithful counsellor of Chief Biyela.

The neck of Siliva was decorated with so many love-letters from Zulu girls that it was stretched and stiffened like that of a giraffe. Here he watches engineer Jimmy Chapman speak to America.





Princess Mdabuli, niece of Chief Biyela.

Mdabuli consults the "Witchdoctor of Love", who advises that she use the magic of the "Lover's Pond".



Take a puff-adder which is advancing directly towards where you are; it comes with a motion which is similar to the creeping of a caterpillar, but faster—much too fast for your comfort. Naturally, this is not because the puff-adder has "feet inside its skin" (as some Africans believe) nor because it walks on its ribs (as I myself had thought); in fact, the ribs do not move at all. What permits that kind of rectilinear locomotion (there are also three other main types of locomotion used by snakes, but the principle is more or less the same in all) is that the snake's skin is loosely attached to the muscles of the body-wall. Furthermore the puff-adder, like all other snakes, has larger scales down the length of its belly than it has on the rest of its body. Now, the puff-adder raises a portion of these larger scales off the ground in several parts of its belly at the same time. Quicker than your eye can see them moving, the snake carries them forward, anchors them on the ground, and throws the body forward through its skin. Instantly, the same operation is repeated with other parts of the belly. The result is that startlingly swift advance, which ceases to be mysterious only when one has fully realized the mechanics of it.

When all this was made clear to me, and I was made fully aware of the essential role that a snake's skin plays in its locomotion, the commonly-known fact that a snake frequently changes its skin struck me as contradictory; it seemed almost as difficult to understand as it would be if an animal which walked on legs periodically replaced its limbs. Moreover, even though I had seen any number of discarded dead skins, I did not understand how a snake managed to do this discarding, or how often it happened.

"For as long as he lives," answered the Sangoma, "a snake grows. And there are some that live up to twenty-five years and more. As he grows, his skin becomes too tight; so he must take it off. Apart from the longer periods when he sleeps,* he changes his skin every moon or so."

"But how do they do it?" I insisted. "Does the old skin come off by itself?"

"No, *Nkosi Cummandà*. I will show you, but we must watch from some distance away and be very quiet. For once," he

* Meaning, when a snake is hibernating.

added, "Dube must not laugh, roll on the ground or even say 'Ugh!'"

With that, he went to rummage in his box of snakes, and took out one whose eyes appeared to be sort of misty. "He is ready," explained the Sangoma. "But he is not blind, as most Zulus believe a snake is when it looks like this. Come."

He took the snake to a place just outside our clearing, where there were lots of rocks of all sizes. He deposited it in the deep shade, and we silently retreated behind a large tree, some ten yards away. The 14-foot long black mamba at once disappeared under a stone. After a while, reassured, he peeped out, tongue flicking. A few more minutes, and he emerged completely. He hesitated near a tree-trunk, and went to another, which had a very rough bark. Against it, he began to rub his head and mouth, right and left, above and below, until the old skin had loosened all around. He did some more hard rubbing. Then, twitching and twisting rapidly from side to side, the mamba began to crawl out of his obsolete "garment". In no time, he was completely free of it—and looking pleasurably relieved.

The Sangoma went to pick him up (easily as anything, of course), and showed him to me.* The mamba's eyes were shining like recently-polished gems, his long body slick and glittering as if freshly-coated with enamel. There, on the ground, was the old skin, pulled off inside out, like a too tight glove. It still showed small traces of the milky oil which the new, slightly larger, skin had secreted to facilitate the operation (just, I thought, as a glove salesman sprinkles talcum into a new glove).

To celebrate the occasion (and, I suspected, to take advantage of it for a little showing-off), the Sangoma forced the mouth of the mamba open, which automatically made the two long fangs rotate forward, from their resting position against the roof of the mouth, into a biting position. Still obviously showing-off, the Sangoma pressed the poison glands, the modified salivary glands which stood out at each side of the mamba's head, at the outer angle of the jaws.

* I apologize for referring to a snake at times as "it", at others as "he". The Sangoma never called a snake anything but "he"—and bad habits are catching.

When little drops of venom began to appear, the Sangoma, with a quick, deft gesture, removed one of the fangs, popped it into his mouth (poison and all), and began to chew it happily.

With mock seriousness, I asked him if that was the proper way to treat a "friend" of his. But he laughed. That extraction, he said, hadn't hurt the mamba a bit, as the large fangs (the one he had chewed had been almost an inch long) were easily detachable. In fact, they often remain buried in the body of a bitten victim. The missing weapon, he assured me, is soon replaced by one of the groups of smaller fangs which are lined up behind the main ones—not only as a reserve, but also as hooks for helping the snake to devour a victim.

Curved backwards, these teeth are an essential part of that other astonishing mechanism which is a snake's mouth. It is generally known that the jaws of all snakes contain ligaments that can be stretched, when feeding, to several times the normal size of the mouth. But actually to see a snake straining to swallow a prey many times bigger than its head, is an entirely different story and, I must confess, a most sickening one. Not only does the snake's mouth stretch incredibly. But the two halves of the lower jaw, being capable of moving independently, act with the inexorable precision of powerful claw-armed paws. The right mandible holds the prey, while the left advances to grab and pull in more of it. Then the left holds, while the right harpoons the prey a bit farther into the snake's mouth. The prey on its side had been anaesthetized by the neurotoxic elements of the venom injected by the bite, which have attacked the nerve centres controlling heart and respiration. The other main component of the venom, being hemotoxic, is in the meantime damaging the cells of the red blood corpuscles, rupturing the capillary walls of the victim—which hasn't a chance left. Nor, because of its hooked teeth, has the snake any chance of letting its prey go, should it come to feel that, after all, the quarry is too big even for its elastic mouth, now stretched to the point of bursting. In such cases, both hapless animals will die, still locked together by that double, deadly hold.

While we are on the subject, there are a few more gruesome facts worth recording—and one which (to me, at least) seems quite cute.

First, explained the Sangoma, one should never carelessly approach a snake which appears to be dead. At the last moment, it may revive suddenly, even if only long enough to strike with its usual speed. Also, some species of snake make a habit of playing dead under certain circumstances, just to bring an unsuspecting, small prey within easy reach. Finally, not even a head completely severed from the body of a poisonous snake, is safe for thirty or thirty-five minutes after decapitation. I have not personally seen anything like this. But the Sangoma assured me that a head, entirely separated from the body for several minutes, can still inflict plenty of damage upon a too-hasty prodder. Apparently, nerve and muscle ends can still react on their own, open the mouth, rotate the fangs into a biting position from the bone on which they are anchored, squeeze the last drops out of the poison glands, and complete a lethal bite.

To show me more about the wonders contained in the small head of a snake, the Sangoma also "milked" various species of his most poisonous friends for me. In every case, it was a simple matter—for him. Force their mouth open to bring their fangs into the biting position, with a stick if necessary. Hook them over the rim of a glass, and press out the contents of the poison glands. In most cases, one milking produced as much as a teaspoonful. The venom was usually odourless, innocent in appearance, yellowish in colour. Once, the Sangoma suggested that I taste a bit of it (assuring me that a small quantity, taken by mouth, would do me no harm); I found it sour-sweet in taste, and my lips, where touched by my venom-tasting finger, tingled as they sometimes had when a dentist had just given me an injection of novacaine. Incidentally, most venoms act, not only as killers for the snake, but also as "tenderizers" of its meal, as they break down the tissues of the prey and so aid digestion.

The item I called cute, is the miniature tooth which the Sangoma made me observe on the nose of some egg-born young snakes; for most of the Zululand species lay eggs, and this egg-tooth (which later disappears) is what permits the snakelet to break through its shell.

However, I hasten to say, this is the only cute detail about just-born snakes. Ten or twelve and, according to the species, even up

to thirty-two or forty in a litter, they are born 100% ready for business. Their poison apparatus, their fangs and the instinct for using them, are already fully developed. And they have to be, because these little creatures—a few inches long (and up to 2½ feet if they are python) are, the moment they are born, on their own. The mother snake has not the slightest interest in them; adult snakes of other species, and often of their own, have no compunction in cannibalizing them; nor is there any fraternal spirit between the members of the same litter. Each young snake goes its own separate way. Entirely on its own, it has to start the endless process of eluding bigger foes; of killing and eating; of growing and changing skins; of hiding and hibernating; and then of starting all over again killing and eating, growing and changing skins.

Everything considered, it is no wonder that snakes haven't a more amicable disposition, nor that they don't enjoy a warmer popularity the world over.

The only young snakes for whom it isn't on the cards that they grow and change their skins for long, are those (and they are not uncommon) whose misfortune it is to have been born Siamese twins. The Sangoma found one such phenomenon for me, and we studied it together, on and off, for several days. It was an anteriorly dichotomous (I believe this is the proper term) *kokote* with a body that had managed to grow to three feet in length, and two heads, each topping a 4-inch long neck, ending with the webbing of skin which united it to the other.

Such two-headed snakes, explained the Sangoma, have already to contend with a quantity of internal complications, such as two hearts instead of one, two stomachs with one only intestine, two lungs instead of the usual one, vertebral columns which at places are double and at others soldered together, and I don't know what else. But even worse are the results of the continuous antagonism, the endless struggle between the intentions, the desires, the decisions, of those two heads. At times, we could see that the right head wanted definitely to go to the right, while the left head wanted, as obstinately, to go to the left. Then the body shook, trembled and got nowhere, thrashing about on the spot, under the contrary impulses it received. This conflict, though comical, became

quite pitiful when the doubleheader was confronted by an obstacle—such as a stick we had planted in the ground, in its path. Upon reaching it, the right head decided to go round it from its side, then to turn immediately left, while the left head simultaneously decided to do exactly the opposite. The result was that, while the webbing of skin stretched to an impossible extent, the two necks encircled the stick and the two heads frantically flicked out their forked tongues, each in the direction opposite to that decreed for it by a cruelly playful nature.

There were many other kinds of conflict, too, some of which ended by one of the heads getting tired or disgusted with the whole business; then, for a while, that head would give up and leave the other in full charge. But the truce never lasted long and, before you knew it, the struggle had begun all over again.

One morning, we found the two-headed *kokote* dead in its special box. But it wasn't two-headed any more. During the night, in some fit of frenzy, the right head had devoured the left, thereby committing not only murder but also suicide.

I GET PROMOTION

MY CONFIDENCE in the Sangoma further increased as I saw how wisely he was taking me, step by gradual step, into the practical field of actually handling snakes. His second or third lesson had to do with a nine-foot green mamba, whose fangs Mtetwa deftly extracted before my eyes. He then asked me to take hold of the mamba in the same way he had done, not to worry about its shiny body crawling over my arm and, after a while, to let its head free.

"He will act as if he is about to strike at your hand," warned the Sangoma. "But do not make any abrupt movement. He knows his fangs are gone and that, until he grows new ones, he cannot bite. If you don't move, he will not even strike your hand."

The mamba acted exactly "as advertised". When he had calmed down a bit more, Mtetwa showed me how to rub, in a certain way, a particular spot under the snake's head. To do this, took more will-power and self-control than I thought I possessed. But I did it. And soon the mamba visibly relaxed. After a little more time under my continuous stroking, it peacefully snuggled against me. I was nonplussed.

"You see," said the Sangoma, "being coldblooded, he likes the warmth of a human hand, of a friendly body—but only of one without any fear in it."

Next time, Mtetwa produced a cobra and rendered it temporarily almost harmless by pressing a stick against each of its pair of fangs and so squeezing all the poison out of its venom glands. Then he set the cobra free in the middle of the clearing and asked me to catch it—not with a forked stick, as I suggested, but with my bare hands.

Closely (*very closely*) following instructions, I managed to put

my foot, not too hard, on the cobra's tail end. In a flash, it turned to strike. But I was ready: I caught its head from above, in the way I had been taught, I let go of the tail, and the cobra's body furiously curled and uncurled round my arm and chest. With its head firmly held between the thumb and forefinger of my right hand, with the left I started that prolonged, gentle but firm stroking. By slow degrees, I released the pressure on its head, until it was free. At once the cobra extended its hood, coiled back and hissed, as if ready to bite.

"It won't harm you," the Sangoma whispered nearby. "Just continue to rub him under the head. Don't stop."

I could scarcely believe it, but, little by little, the long scaly body began to relax, the hoods retracted and the cobra's back arched, very much like that of a kitten! He wasn't purring, but neither was he hissing any more. His forked tongue still streaked in and out; but no longer in wild anger—only gently in time with my slow stroking.

Strangely enough, my repulsion for snakes had vanished. Almost without my noticing it, I felt no more repugnance for them, it was no longer an effort for me to caress them. Even more surprisingly, I was beginning to appreciate fully the beauty of their colouring, the spark in their brilliant eyes, the incredible delicacy of the juxtaposition of their laminae—all of which I believe is strikingly revealed in the best of our close-up photographs (both cine and still).

Every evening, when I called Ellen in Durban over the telephone, I found it impossible to completely hide my new and growing enthusiasm. Even though I conveniently forgot to say much about my handling of snakes, the leitmotiv of her conversation came to be an anxious "But—be careful, honey."

By when a deservedly-fatigued, but proud, Sashelo returned, I realized that I had learned more about snakes in those few days of his absence than I had in the whole of my life.

My progress in practical herpetology began to pay immediate dividends, when we started again on the Place of Snakes. Even though, below the branch which I was not too securely straddling, dozens of poisonous snakes lay in nervous ambush, I went through

every action I wanted Sashelo to perform for the cameras, over and over again, without any sense of fear.

Naturally, that feeling of mine, since it was not put on, but perfectly genuine, communicated itself to the others. The cameramen and Dube, perched above—on higher, weaker branches—stuck, with efficiency and competence, to their work. Sashelo did his job beautifully. He slid along the big branch, to the spot where he was to tie the vegetable rope of the Red Ball, without one downward glance of fear more than was necessary, and natural. He clearly, forcefully enunciated the final, traditional curses which were to ensure that as soon as the Red Ball of Death fell, Sukumbana would be bitten by a snake and die.

When a dry branch (dropped by Dube!! on cue) hit him, he lost his balance and slipped almost completely off the branch, so realistically that many snakes below began to hiss and strike blindly at his dangling feet. To be frank, he made me catch my breath—just as if I hadn't, myself, done the very same thing three or four times, a few minutes before.

When Sashelo was through (and the cameramen and Dube had taken his place on the big branch, to get some large close-ups of the snakes below, and of the Red Ball falling among them), the Sangoma and Utanvasile alone were not enough to control all the snakes at the same time, without entering the camera's field of vision. Then, silly as it might seem, I felt very proud to find myself assisting them—just as if to do so were as much my natural business as theirs.

That whole series of risky, difficult scenes, which I had dreaded for so long and which I had thought would take up several days, was easily completed in a few hours of brilliant sunshine. Moreover, to my utter astonishment, I soon became quite adept at the Sangoma's trick of catching snakes which were trying to move away from where we wanted them. Remember that these were not snakes which had been in the Sangoma's possession for even a second. They were completely wild in their own sinister habitat, and very angry at being disturbed and pushed around in that evil place where nobody ever dared to intrude upon them.

Yet, again, the Sangoma's method seemed to be simplicity itself—

after he had taught me how! All I had to do was to grab the tail and twist it round so fast that the snake was never able to obtain sufficient purchase on the ground to coil up and strike. It was as effective as pulling a rug from under the feet of a man attempting to throw a punch. If the twisting of my wrist slowed down for a second, the snake would instantly try to strike (and who could blame it?). But a short stick promptly applied under its head would block the attack for the moment, until the disconcerting twisting motion, which I resumed in a hurry, again threw the snake off balance.

I don't have to add that this was a technique I had first of all studied, and extensively practised, with the snakes from the Sangoma's box. Such training, in addition to giving me the necessary confidence and a real proficiency in the trick, also had the advantage of permitting us to take a large number of pictures, moving and still—which, by the way, I should be only too glad to show any doubting Thomas.

We then came to the very last group of scenes that remained before I finished the main picture, said good-bye to our clearing and to all our friends—new and old, white and black—and joined Ellen in Durban, for our return to America.

Said the outline glibly:

"Sukumbana, having just followed the instructions of the Royal Chief and given Siliva the assegai test at the euphorbia trees, emerges from the bushes, retrieves his spear (which, after grazing Siliva, has hit one of the euphorbia trunks), and looks at the latter's stiff, still-enraged, diminishing figure. Sukumbana's eyes are smiling with gratification and expectation, as he is glad that the youth has passed the test, and hopeful that, soon, the life-saving medicine will be brought back to his friend, the Royal Chief.

"What the old *induna* cannot know is that, far away, the Red Ball of Death happens to have fallen, that very minute, among the snakes. What he doesn't see, as he still watches the almost disappearing figure of Siliva, is a big, vicious puff-adder, which is swiftly advancing, half hidden by the yellowish grass, towards him.

"Sukumbana's right leg (decorated with the usual, red-and-white beaded 'bracelet' that he always wears just below his right knee), makes a first step forward, as he prepares to return to the Chief's kraal, to report. But, before his right foot can again touch the ground, the puff-adder strikes, bites deeply into his ankle.

"Sukumbana jumps backward, at the same time hitting the puff-adder again and again with his assegai, until he kills the beast. He sits on the ground, squeezes the bite as hard as he can and, at the risk of revealing the secret of the test, calls for help.

"Siliva, though far away, hears the cry, halts and is about to turn his head. But he remembers the Royal Chief's words: *'Do not turn your head, whatever happens.'* This far away call of despair, he thinks, is another part of the test. He shrugs his wide shoulders, and determinedly resumes his march.

"Sukumbana understands—and realizes that his end is about to come. The puff-adder's fangs have penetrated deeply. If they have reached a vein or artery, he knows that it means death in two minutes. Already half-unconscious, he calls once again, feebly, 'Silivaaaaaa'. Then he falls backward. With a last convulsion, he expires."

All this, of course, we had already photographed before—except for that little detail of the puff-adder's swiftly approaching and actually biting that red-and-white-bead-decorated right leg. Now that this had to be done, how were we going to manage it? The Sangoma had been more than co-operative and willing; Dube was on his toes and, for once, keeping within a reasonable distance; the cameramen, photographers and sound engineers were ready; the Sangoma, with Sukumbana's ornament on his right leg, was ready too—but the snakes weren't.

Utanvasile pulled a puff-adder out of the snake-box, and directed it towards the feet of Mtetwa. The Sangoma with intentional abruptness, lifted his right foot—and nothing happened. It was a variation from the script, but I asked him to step hard on the snake. The Sangoma did so—hard enough to infuriate a hibernating puff-adder. But not that one! It inflated its entire body, it expelled

air with a violent "puff", as of steam escaping under strong pressure (which is why the snake is so called)—but it didn't even dream of biting.

This was infuriating. There was only an hour or so of sun left. We tried again and again—with two *kokotes*, with one black and with two green mambas. Absolutely nothing doing. However hard the Sangoma stepped on them, those "friends" of his simply refused to bite him.

Finally, so that we could complete this last scene, the Sangoma had to go off, to "call" and catch a "brand-new" puff-adder. When, straight in front of the cameras, Mtetwa lifted his foot in the direction of this adder, the reaction was instantaneous. Its bite was as vicious and as deep as could be.

When the snake was out of the cameras' field, I said "Cut!" and ran after it. The Sangoma was calmly rubbing his usual blackish powder into the bites, but not even for that did he take his eyes off me for a second. He watched me catch up with the puff-adder, step on its tail, grab it, and twist it round and round, faster and faster.

Between you and me, even though we needed the snake again for close-ups, the Sangoma could have brought it back in a few minutes. Moreover, I knew only too well that, even if I had a bite from that snake, it wouldn't be a killer—so soon after he had inflicted such a brute of a one on the Sangoma. I just wanted to show-off a bit, myself, for this once. For, after all, it was still an enraged puff-adder—the ugliest of Zululand's snakes—and the one kind of snake with which I hadn't as yet managed to become, in any manner, chummy. At any rate, I went on twisting and twisting, until the puff-adder was dizzy with it all. Then, as I lifted it high into the air by the tail, nonchalantly asking the head cameraman exactly where he wanted it, the Sangoma nodded and smiled, with satisfied approval.

Mtetwa might have had as much of his tongue in his cheek as he had snake-poison in his leg—which was plenty. But I must admit that what he said then, made me as proud as if a great president or a noble king had bestowed on me some much prized decoration.

"*Cummandà Sangoma!*" That's what he called me in front of

everybody, including a just-arrived and much-startled Mr. Lugg.

Be that as it may, I had enough sense of humour left to find a sort of poetic justice in the fact that my life's worst fear, my essentially superstitious dread of snakes, had at long last been so thoroughly dispelled—by a member of that very race whose superstitions I had so often proclaimed childish, foolish, obnoxious, preposterous, and whatever other scornful adjective I could think of.

What's more, that was quite a big promotion from just *Nkosi Putuma*. It sounded good, too. And everybody seemed to approve of it—and to enjoy enormously the flush of pink on my face. Yes, believe it or not, I blushed.

Cummandà Sangoma. Ha!

Cal
N 24/3/20

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